

In Another World With My Smartphone

Patora Fuyuhara
illustration • Eiji Usatsuka

25



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Two anime-style girls with light blue hair and blue eyes are standing side-by-side, wearing black and white maid outfits with purple bows. They are both looking towards the right with expressions of surprise and excitement. The girl on the left has her hand near her chest, while the girl on the right has her mouth open in a wide smile. The background is a soft-focus indoor setting with a red wall and a white chair.

**“DAD,
LOOK!
LOOK!”**

Oddly enough,
the two were dressed
in maid outfits, so
I really wondered what
was going on.

**“WOW,
YOU’RE
SO CUTE!
IT REALLY
SUITS YOU
TWO.”**

A GRAND DAY OUT ON THE MAGIC TRAIN!





“UGH... I'M SO TIRED...”
Yakumo wailed.

After making her order, Yakumo just about collapsed in the Parent Café. Their group was quite large, so the eight young girls had to push two tables together.

Character Profiles



Elze Silhoueska

One of Touya's wives. The elder of the twin sisters saved by Touya some time ago. A ferocious melee fighter, she makes use of gauntlets in combat. Her personality is fairly to-the-point and blunt. She can make use of Null fortification magic, specifically the spell **[Boost]**. She loves spicy foods.



**Yumina
Urnea Belfast**

One of Touya's wives. Princess of the Belfast Kingdom. She was twelve years old in her initial appearance, and her eyes are heterochromatic. The right is blue, while the left is green. She has mystic eyes that can discern the true character of an individual. She has three magical aptitudes: Earth, Wind, and Darkness. She's also extremely proficient with a bow and arrow. She fell in love with Touya at first sight.



Mochizuki Touya

A highschooler who was accidentally murdered by God. He's a no-hassle kind of guy who likes to go with the flow. He's not very good at reading the atmosphere, and typically makes rash decisions that bite him in the ass. His mana pool is limitless, he can flawlessly make use of every magical element, and he can cast any Null spell that he wants. He's currently the Grand Duke of Brunhild.



**Sushie
Urnea Ortlinde**

One of Touya's wives. She was ten years old in her initial appearance. Her nickname is Sue. The niece of Belfast's king, and Yumina's cousin. Touya saved her from being attacked on the road. She has an innocently adventurous spirit.



**Lucia Leah
Regulus**

One of Touya's wives. The Third Princess of the Regulus Empire, she's Yumina's age. She fell in love with Touya when he saved her during a coup. She likes to fight with twin blades, and she's on good terms with Yumina.



Kokonoe Yae

One of Touya's wives. A samurai girl from the far eastern land of Eashen, a country much like Japan. She tends to repeat herself and speak formally, she does. Yae is quite a glutton, eating more than most normal people would dare touch. She's a hard worker, but can sometimes slack off. Her family runs a dojo back in Eashen, and they take great pride in their craft. It's not obvious at first, but her boobs are pretty big.



Linze Silhoueska

One of Touya's wives. The younger of the twin sisters saved by Touya some time ago. She wields magic, specifically from the schools of Light, Water, and Fire. She finds talking to people difficult due to her own shy nature, but she is known to be surprisingly bold at times. Rumors say she might be the kind of girl who enjoys male on male romance... She loves sweet foods.



Paula

A stuffed toy bear animated by years upon years of the **[Program]** spell. She's the result of two-hundred years of programmed commands, making her seem like a fully aware living being. Paula... Paula's the worst!



Sakura

A mysterious girl Touya rescued in Eashen. She had lost her memories, but has now finally gotten them back. Her true identity is Farnese Forneus, daughter of the Xenoahs Overlord. Currently living a peaceful life in Brunhild, and she has joined the ranks of Touya's wives.



Leen

One of Touya's wives. Former Clan Matriarch of the Fairies, she now serves as Brunhild's Court Magician. She claims to be six-hundred-and-twelve years old, but looks tremendously young. She can wield every magical element except Darkness, meaning her magical proficiency is that of a genius. Leen is a bit of a light-hearted bully.



**Hildegard
Minas Lestia**

One of Touya's wives. First Princess of the Knight Kingdom Lestia. Her swordplay talents earned her a reputation as a 'Knight Princess.' Touya saved her life when she was attacked by a group of Phrase, and she's loved him ever since. She's a good friend of Yae, and she stammers a bit when flustered.



Luli

The fourth of Touya's summoned Heavenly Beasts. She is the Azure Monarch, the ruler of dragons. She often clashes with Kohaku due to her condescending personality.



Kougyoku

The third of Touya's summoned Heavenly Beasts. She is the Flame Monarch, ruler of feathered things. Though her appearance is flashy and extravagant, she's actually quite cool and collected.



Sango and Kokuyou

The second of Touya's summoned Heavenly Beasts. They are the Black Monarch, two in one. The rulers of scaled beasts. They can freely manipulate water. Sango is a tortoise, and Kokuyou is a snake. Sango is a female, and Kokuyou is a male (but he's very much a female at heart).



Kohaku

The first of Touya's summoned Heavenly Beasts. She's the White Monarch, the ruler of beasts, the guardian of the west and a beautiful White Tiger. She can create devastating shockwaves, and also change size at will.



High Rosetta

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Workshop, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Rosetta for short. Her Airframe Serial Number is #27. For whatever reason, she's the most reliable of the bunch.



Francesca

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Hanging Garden, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Cesca for short. Her Airframe Serial Number is #23. She likes to tell very inappropriate jokes.



Mochizuki Moroha

The God of Swords. Claims to be Touya's older sister. She trains the and advises the knights of Brunhild. She's gallant and brave, but also a bit of an airhead at times.



Mochizuki Karen

The God of Love. Claims to be Touya's older sister. She stays in Brunhild because she says she needs to catch a servile god, but doesn't really do all that much in the way of hunting him. She's a total pain in the butt.



Pamela Noël

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Tower, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Noel for short and wears a jersey. Her Airframe Serial Number is #25. She sleeps all the time, and eats laying down. Her tremendous laziness means she doesn't do all that much.



Preliora

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Rampart, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Liora for short and wears a blazer. Her Airframe Serial Number is #20. She's the oldest of the Babylon Gynoids, and would attend to the... Personal night-time needs of Doctor Babylon herself. She has no experience with men.



Fredmonica

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Hangar, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Monica for short. Her Airframe Serial Number is #28. She's a funny little hard worker who has a bit of a casual streak. She's a good friend of Rosetta, and is the Gynoid with the most knowledge of the Frame Gears.



Bell Flora

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Alchemy Lab, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Flora for short and wears a nurse outfit. Her Airframe Serial Number is #21. A nurse with dangerously big boobs and even more dangerous medicines.



Doctor Regina Babylon

An ancient genius from a lost civilization, reborn into an artificial body that resembles a small girl. She is the "Babylon" that created the many artifacts and forgotten technologies scattered around the world today. Her Airframe serial number is #29. She remained in stasis for five-thousand years before finally being awakened.



Atlantica

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Research Lab, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Tica for short. Her Airframe serial number is #22. Of the Babylon Numbers, she is the one who best embodies Doctor Babylon's inappropriately perverse side.



Lileleparshe

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Storehouse, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Parshe for short and wears a shrine maiden outfit. Her Airframe Serial Number is #26. She's tremendously clumsy, even if she's just trying to help. The amount of stuff she ruins is troublingly high.



Irisfam

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Library, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Fam for short and wears a school uniform. Her Airframe Serial Number is #24. She's a total book fanatic and hates being interrupted when she's reading.

The Story So Far!

Mochizuki Touya, wielding a smartphone customized by God himself, continues to live his life in a newly formed double-world! The war against the Wicked God, which threatened the existence of two innocent worlds, has finally come to an end. Touya has emerged victorious, but at what cost? Now he's saddled with divine duties! Awakened to godliness! Our hapless young lad is to be caretaker of the newly-created world. Fortunately, things seem to be at peace. But could this only be a surface observation? The seeds of discord are sown out of sight, and chaos could very well burst from the dark... How will Touya fare in his new station? Only time will tell.

The Worlds of In Another World With My Smartphone World Map





Chapter I: View from the Otherworld Train

“Dad, look! Look!”

“Hold on, Linne!”

It was late afternoon. I was sipping tea on my balcony, having just finished the duties Kousaka had assigned to me...when I heard the pitter-patter of Linne and Elna running toward me.

Oddly enough, the two were dressed in maid outfits, so I really wondered what was going on.

“Wow, you’re so cute! It really suits you two.”

“Mmm... You’re both very cute. Looks good on you.”

Yumina and Sue, who were sitting with me, voiced their thoughts.

Just cute? It’s way more than that... How can I even begin to describe this sight?

“How do we look, dad? Well?”

“Really cute.”

Dammit. That was such a stupid reply... Well, whatever. It’s still true. They’re really cute, yeah... Wait, hold on. Why are they dressed like that?

“Ahem... What’s with the outfits, you two? Did Linze make them?”

“Yeah. We said we were gonna help Ms. Renne out, so Mommy Linze made some for us. It was so fast... Like lickety-split!” Elna replied casually.

Lickety-split, huh? Probably only took her a few minutes, yeah. When it comes to sewing, Linze’s ability is godly. Literally too, given her divinity and all. But they’re helping Renne, huh? I guess they’re

similar in age, so that makes sense... How old's that girl now? Ten? Eleven?

"It's funny working with the current Ms. Renne. She's so little compared to how we know her."

"Mhm. She's like another person."

"R-Really now?"

The Renne they knew was a Renne who lived over a decade in the future, after all... I wondered what kind of adult she'd end up becoming.

"Hm... The Ms. Renne we know is a perfect maid and she speaks really politely. She's quite different right now... Also, she's our etiquette coach in the future."

"Seriously?!" Sue yelled, going wide-eyed at the revelation. She probably couldn't believe that Renne, who followed her around sometimes like a little sister, could change so drastically.

I could understand how she felt, honestly. I never imagined that Renne, who used to live on the street and used to call me bruv, would end up becoming a picture-perfect maid... Though it was true she'd been learning to speak more politely since she came here.

"Ms. Renne's amazing in the future. She can do almost anything. She can fight, she can cook, she can sew...and she knows everything there is to know about manners. She's a little hard on us at times, though..."

"I see... We probably had her educate you all because she was capable of being strict," Yumina chimed in with a nod.

"Linne's just mad because she skips all her etiquette training and gets in trouble for it. Ms. Renne is very kind to me."

"Jeez..." Elna's words caused Linne to grumble. We all then laughed slightly before the door opened and Renne herself appeared.

“Umm...are Elna and Linne in here?”

As far as Renne knew, the kids were my distant relatives. They were all wearing brooches that had **[Mirage]** enchanted on them, making them look like regular children to most onlookers. I also explained away them calling me and my wives dad and mom as being weird old nicknames that stuck.

“The head maid’s waiting on you both. Shall we?”

“Oh, sorry! Let’s go, Elna!”

“Mhm. We’ll be on our way, father. See you soon, mothers.”

“Oh, wait a second. Let me take a picture!”

Just as Linne and her sister started to run off, I stopped them in their tracks. There was no way I was going to miss the chance to capture this precious moment. Thus, I quickly whipped my smartphone out of my pocket.

“Oh, right. Renne, you should join too!”

“Huh?!”

Elna and Linne both dragged Renne to their side without another word.

All right, that’s good...

The shutter clicked...and I got three good pictures out of it.

“Send us a copy later, okay?!”

With that, the three girls rushed out of the room. They were like a whirlwind...

“Hm... To think Renne’ll end up like that... Time sure does change people, huh?” Sue spoke quietly as she sipped her tea.

“That might be part of it, but even now she’s an earnest worker. She always tries her best, no matter the task, so she definitely has the makings of a perfect maid.”

I had a feeling that it might have been more nurture than nature, though. She had people around to teach her both etiquette and combat... We had all manner of gods stopping by the castle, after all.

I wondered if Renne might have some blessing from the divine as well. She often tended the fields with Uncle Kousuke, so I couldn’t help but imagine she’d end up as one of his dependents.

“I can’t help but feel jealous... Just when will my child arrive, I wonder...” Yumina said as she let out a small sigh. Yae’s daughter, Yakumo, hadn’t arrived at the castle yet either, though we knew she was wandering around the world somewhere. The ones we hadn’t heard about at all were Yumina’s child and Sue’s child, whoever they were.

“Don’t worry, Yumina. From what the other kids are saying, there’s a good chance ours are already here.”

“Then why wouldn’t they come to see us, Sue?!”

“Don’t ask me... They might just be busy with something? Or maybe they’re making their way here...?”

Hmm... I really do wonder where they are. I hope they’re not avoiding me on purpose. That’d be real sad...

“Can’t you just use **[Recall]** on one of our kids to find out what they look like, then search for them?”

“Uhhh...Granny Tokie said I can’t go looking through their memories... She said our kids are all safe and sound, so it should be fine if we just wait.”

[Recall] allowed me to analyze people's memories and see things through them. If I used it on one of my kids, I'd be able to easily see things I hadn't seen before, and then use [Search] to find them.

"One of them's a boy, right? Maybe he's busy playing around, so he just forgot to come here..."

"Mmm, yeah. That's certainly possible. But according to Allis, Kuon has a pretty level head on his shoulders, and he's pretty strong too. I wouldn't worry."

"And what if he's in trouble?"

"He's Touya's son. He'll be able to handle it in minutes..."

"C'mon now..."

Don't just go making assumptions... One of you is his mother, remember?

"No point worrying about it, at any rate. We'll just have to wait and see, okay?"

"I suppose you're right... Oh, Touya. Could I have a copy of that photo?"

"Oh, me too."

"Sure thing."

I sent the pictures over to Yumina and Sue. I'd taken a lot of photos of my kids since they'd arrived, so I just forwarded them all to the photo-sharing app that we all had access to.

"Where are the other kids today, Yumina? Any idea?"

"Frei is with Hilde and Yae at the training ground. Arcia is preparing food in the kitchen with Lu. And as far as I know, Yoshino and Quun are up in Babylon."

That makes sense for Quun, but Yoshino too? What's she doing up there?

I decided to head up and check it out.

I headed over to the workshop, and sure enough both Quun and Yoshino were there. Quun was busy working on her construction Golem, while Yoshino was fiddling with some tools nearby.

“Oh, daddy!”

“What’ve you got there?”

“It’s a musical instrument. Take a look,” Yoshino said as she handed over a small board with staggered metal tines lining it from left to right.

This is an instrument?

There was a hole in the middle of it, almost like a guitar’s, and the metal tines were arranged inward like a V-shape. Something about it seemed familiar, but I couldn’t quite put my finger on it... And so, I pressed the metal tines. However, they didn’t make any sounds. I was stumped as to how to play it.

“Oh, you’re not supposed to press them. Try strumming them instead.”

“Strumming?”

I used my fingertip to strum at the tines, and it let out a pinging noise in response.

Oh, that’s how it works.

“It’s called a kalimba. Don’t you know it? You’re the one who taught me how to play it.”

“I-I did?”

Well, it wasn’t really me... It was Future Touya! I’m not really familiar with this kalimba, though.

I took out my smartphone and hopped on the internet to run a search.

Oh, I see.

The kalimba. It was an instrument from Africa, also known as the finger harp or the thumb piano. The mechanisms inside were similar to that of a music box.

Oh, now I remember... My grandpa's favorite band used to incorporate this instrument. I remember seeing it at their live performances.

"So you can make instruments, Yoshino?"

"I can. Simple ones, at least. I usually have Quun help make the more complicated ones with her **[Modeling]**, though. It's fun to play different kinds."

Makes sense. Guess she takes after her mother with her love for music, but she seems to be more interested in instruments than singing. That might be Sousuke's influence on her...

"Can you play for me?"

"Of course. I'll strum a tune," Yoshino replied as she began to play a song on the kalimba. The melody was slow and relaxed. It was an extremely beautiful sound.

Hmm... Is this...Pachelbel's Canon?

Johann Pachelbel's Canon. It was the first part of his "Canon and Gigue for 3 violins and basso continuo." It was a melody made out of a gradually repeated rhythm.

Yoshino played it beautifully, reminding me of why it had become such a famous tune. The way she played it on the kalimba stirred the depths of my soul.

This is amazing... I didn't know you could play this with just two thumbs... Wait, hold on. Why am I hearing the flute? Huh? Wait, don't tell me...

I turned away from Yoshino and saw Sousuke playing the flute in a nearby corner.

Of course. Wherever music is, he appears.

I closed my eyes and let the melody wash over me. It was a rare moment of joy, to hear a beautiful song played by the god of music and my own daughter from the future.

Once the performance ended, I gave them both a full round of applause.

That was incredible... What a blessed performance.

Quun and Rosetta walked over, applauding as well...though Quun was clapping using her Arm Gear's hand mechanisms.

"He he he he... I'm a little embarrassed..."

"No, don't be. It was a stunning performance, Yoshino."

I'd like to join her next time, I think. A performance with my daughter sounds like a lot of fun...

I looked up at Quun in her Arm Gear.

"Can you play anything?"

"I have some mild talents. My mother likes to listen to music, so I've picked up a thing or two."

Apparently, some of my kids liked music, while others didn't care much for it. Yakumo, Frei, and Linne weren't all that interested it seemed.

"Anyway, forget all that, father! Look at my upgrades! I call it the Armored Arm Gear: Beowulf! I'm ready to fight!" Quun exclaimed as she piloted her machine and made it flex its arms. It had big arms and thick legs, with a rugged torso that was clearly built for power. The sight of my tiny daughter riding it gave it a comically unbalanced look.

“What are you gonna fight with it, exactly?”

“Nothing in particular. But it never hurts to have more firepower, no?”

Hmm... I wonder if she's thinking about how to face the wicked devout on her own... I kinda feel like a failure of a father if my kids are worrying about that stuff.

I briefly mired myself in misery when my phone began to ring.

Hm? It's from King Felsen.

“Uhhh, hello?”

“Oh, Grand Duke? We've finished our magic train, I'm wondering if you can help with the last parts...between Belfast and Refreese...”

“Oh, I see... Got it. I'll head right over.”

The first magic trains existed five thousand years ago, and there were already similar vehicles on the western continent...but the eastern continent's first modern magic train was built in Felsen, and was intended to be run on a track between Refreese and Belfast.

Various Earth mages had already built the tracks between the two countries, so now all that was needed was the train itself.

Considering the fact that I could move things across great distances instantly, it was up to me to take care of that last part. Though I'd admittedly forgotten about it amid all the wicked devout stuff.

I hung up my phone, turned to Quun and the others, and said, “I'm gonna head to Felsen to pick up their magic train. It shouldn't take long, so I'll take lunch first and—”

Before I could even finish speaking, Quun's arm shot right up—or rather, the Arm Gear's did—and she exclaimed, “Take me! Take me with you, father!”

“I’m only ferrying it between Felsen and Belfast. We’re not actually riding the train, you know?”

“That’s fine! I want to take pictures! It’s a brand new train! How exciting!”

Oh... Is my daughter a trainspotter? Nah, she just loves all kinds of tech.

I didn’t see a problem with her coming, so I figured there was no reason to turn her down.

“You wanna tag along, Yoshino?”

“I’ll skip out this time. I need to work on controlling my pitch. Go have fun with Quun, okay?”

Huh. Guess Yoshino doesn’t care about the train. Maybe most girls wouldn’t... Quun’s just a bit special.

“All right, let’s get going, then... But leave the Arm Gear behind, okay?”

“Aww... But I wanted to show it off to King Felsen...”

I’d rather you not do that... It’ll just end up causing me a big headache. If King Felsen doesn’t get fired up about it, his wife definitely will. I don’t have time for that kind of thing today, okay? We’ll do it later...

After I persuaded Quun to give up, I opened a **[Gate]** and we headed off to Felsen.

◇ ◇ ◇

One week later...we were in the royal capital of Belfast, attending the opening ceremony for the magic train between Belfast and Refreese. We’d completed the test runs, and the two train tracks had already been run through the station building.

The station was named Alephis Station, after the royal capital itself. A single line ran from it to Bern, the imperial capital of Refreese. It made four stops along the way, with the full journey taking about five hours.

We stood on the platform, looking up at the first magic train seen on the eastern continent in thousands of years. It'd been named Rhinebell. It was silvery white with blue streaks running over the outside. It was kind of rounded in shape and didn't have a chimney like you might see on a steam locomotive. Instead, there were two vents on either side of the main car that emitted smoky ether residue.

In terms of looks, it definitely would've been right at home in a steampunk story. But in terms of actual operation, it ran on magic batteries, so it was closer to an electric train than anything else. It was also very quiet.

"Enough with the pictures, Quun. Don't you have enough already?"

"Just let me snap a few more, okay?! I want to capture all the best angles!"

I sighed quietly as Quun took pictures of the train from every possible vantage point. She'd already taken a bunch of photos when I'd first delivered it, so I didn't understand the point of her getting even more now.

We'd been formally invited to the event, so we were set to ride on the inaugural trip. Normally, it would've just been me and my wives, but we managed to get Quun and the other kids on board as well. Allis wanted to join us as well, so Ende tagged along as her chaperone. Though, he'd also been hired by the kingdom as an adventurer just in case anything dangerous happened.

Various noble and merchant families from Belfast would be joining us on the ride, including Duke Ortlinde and his family. Their children

were just as excited as Quun was, presumably because they'd never seen a train before.

"Ed looks so excited."

Sue's brother, Edward, was cradled in his mother's arms as she sat on a bench not too far from the train. The little baby was giggling over at the vehicle.

"Mhm! You like the train, don't you, Ed? We're gonna get on it soon!" Sue exclaimed as she gently held her brother's hands in her own. Linne and Allis noticed that, so they walked over to him with big smiles on their faces.

"Wow, look at little Ed!"

"Ha ha, wow! He really is little! This is weird!"

Their comments made Duke Ortlinde raise his brow.

"...Little Ed?"

"Oh, father! We should board now, okay?" Sue said. She wisely saved us a headache by leading her family away. Linne and Allis realized their mistake and they quickly scampered back over to me.

"Come on... Mind what you say, okay?"

"Sorry..."

"Ed plays with us a lot in the future, so it's funny seeing him as a little baby."

Apparently, the distance between Belfast and Brunhild didn't matter all that much in the future. Still, the fact that he played with my kids didn't surprise me much. He was their uncle, after all.

The Belfastians started to head into their respective train carriages. It appeared departure was close at hand. We all followed suit and entered the train. We were all seated in the first carriage, nearest the front. The door wasn't automatic, so the station attendant

locked it from the outside after we boarded. That meant the door couldn't ordinarily be opened from the inside. There was, however, an emergency escape lever that forced the door open if necessary.

"Wow, it's amazing!" Elze said, then blinked in surprise as she saw the inside of the carriage. It was so spacious that it almost felt like we were in a reception room. There was a soft carpet below our feet, comfy couches lined each side of the carriage, and manastone lights and a skylight rested above us. They even had a fridge in the corner stocked with drinks, including wine and fruit water.

This carriage was a VIP one, largely reserved for royalty or aristocracy. It had more features than the regular ones and even had a temperature regulation system.

The kids all clambered up onto the couches and looked out of the windows. A moment later, a whistle sounded out on the platform, and the vehicle shuddered as it began to move. The mana batteries activated the motors, and the wheels began turning...

"It's moving!"

The ether residue sparkled beautifully in the air as the Rhinebell began to slowly shunt its way out of the station.

I looked out the window as we began our journey. There wasn't much vibration, and there wasn't much noise. It was different from the trains I was familiar with. The track to Refreese was elevated several meters off the ground, kind of like a long bridge. It would've taken months to build something like this back on Earth, but magic made it a trifling matter. I'd helped with some of the more intricate stuff, like connecting the bridge over water and putting the finishing touches on it.

Damn, the view's awesome...

A short while after we departed from Alephis, we started passing by a great plain. The ride ahead would be nothing but open plains and

woodland. And yet, even though there wasn't much to see out there, the kids were pressed right up against the windows. I did the exact same thing when I was little, so it wasn't that shocking to me.

"Want a drink, Touya?"

"Sure, I'd love one."

Yumina smiled as she brought over a drink to my side.

Well, can't imagine anything happening today. I'll just enjoy the ride.

◇ ◇ ◇

The magic train rumbled through the plains and began passing through a mountain range. All the passengers seemed to enjoy the sights of mountains and hills in between periods of darkness as we proceeded through tunnels.

"This is as fast as the train we rode back on your home planet, Touya."

"Yeah. It's pretty damn amazing."

I smiled as I talked to Yumina, who was seated next to me. According to Doc Babylon, her civilization's trains ran even faster than these ones. Must've meant bullet train speeds were closer to regular speeds for her people.

"Oh! Wyverns!" I turned my head in response to Linne's exclamation. Sure enough, two Wyverns were soaring through the air not too far away.

"Hm... They're coming this way," Duke Ortlinde said, raising his voice in concern.

The two Wyverns presumably thought the speedy train was some new form of fast-moving prey, and they swooped down close. But,

just as it seemed they'd sink their claws into the metal vehicle...they were abruptly repelled by a mysterious force.

"Gwargh?!"

The Wyverns went into a tailspin and hit the ground hard. I didn't get a long look at them, but it didn't look like either of them was moving.

Undeterred, the magic train sped along the tracks on its way.

"Once the train hits a certain speed, its anti-monster enchantments activate. In this case, there's an enchantment on them that repels attacks and inflicts the **[Paralyze]** spell on anything that gets too close. Wild monsters should gradually learn to not interact with the train."

"Huh, I see. That's pretty smart," I said, nodding along as Quun explained the mechanism.

Killing any nearby monsters would've been easy enough, but it'd be a pain to hit airborne ones. Plus, it'd be a real problem if dead monsters were littering the tracks. **[Paralyze]** seemed like a pretty happy medium in that regard. That being said...those two Wyverns were now sitting ducks for any other beasts that wanted to come along and eat them... Not quite survival of the fittest, but that was nature for you.

"Still, in a few years, the new models will have aerial interceptors fitted onto them. And then, not too long after that, Golem trains will be popularized. It'll be much safer in general..."

"Er...in a few years?" Duke Ortlinde mumbled, raising a brow in response to Quun's murmuring. Sue, who was tending to her little brother, suddenly leaped up and grabbed at her father's sleeve.

"L-Look, father! Ed's agitated! Would you take him for me?!"

"Hm? Oh, of course. There, there, Edward... You're fine now. Those nasty Wyverns are gone," Duke Ortlinde said as he brought Ed over

to his wife. Then, the two started to fawn over the baby. Meanwhile, Sue marched over to Quun and started pressing her fingers into the poor girl's temples. The look on my daughter's face seemed to be a cry for help, so I let out a small sigh and walked over.

"You need to be more careful with what you say, Quun. Remember who's around us."

"It just slipped out... I'm really sorry," Quun replied quietly as she rubbed the sides of her head.

The kids weren't all that far off Sue's age. Frei, the oldest, was only a few years younger than her. Hell, Quun wasn't that far off either. That was probably why they could more freely scrap with each other like children. Sue had even gotten into the habit of covering up for the kids' flubs, perhaps because her own child had yet to arrive and she didn't want anything to go haywire before that.

We carried on through the mountains until we reached a forested area. The rumbling of the train sent tremors through nearby trees, causing startled birds to take off in unison. There were birds of white, black, red, blue, green, and many other colors scattering away into the sky.

"Wow! Mom, look at that!"

"Mhm. It's amazing, Linne."

"Oh, look over there, mother... It's a ribbit-ribbit bird."

"I-Is that what that is?"

Linze, Linne, Elna, and Elze all leaned close to the windows as they watched the sight.

...What the hell is a ribbit-ribbit bird?

"Touya-dono, where are we now?" Yae asked. Her question prompted me to pull up my smartphone and project a map. We were

still in Belfast, and we had quite a way to go before even reaching Refreese's border.

"Oh, we're coming up to the first station soon!"

"Yes, it's in Parameia, the main town found in the Parames family's territory. Count Parames governs over this area. It's something of a nature preserve, with farms, forests, and stunning plateaus in abundance. Well-to-do Belfastian families often come to stay here in the summertime," Yumina said, explaining a bit more about the land we were passing through.

Huh, so it's like a summer resort? Guess it's kinda like what Karuizawa is in Japan.

The magic train slowed down as it approached Parameia Station. And soon enough, we saw buildings outside the window and the scene looked a whole lot more civilized.

Wow... This place is almost as well developed as the capital city. I guess it's more of an urban tourist destination?

The magic train would stop here for about ten minutes. Count Parames, the local lord, was apparently here to greet us. Duke Ortlinde, being the king's brother and all, had to get up to go see him.

Damn, poor guy... Must suck having to leave the train and come all the way back just to speak to one dude.

"...Touya. What are you doing? Did you forget that you're a visiting royal as well?" Leen said, then stared at me blankly until I remembered that I was also a member of royalty. I'd gotten so into the family feeling of the trip that I'd forgotten I was technically here on official business.

"Oh, right. I have to go see him too, huh?"

As the train rested on the platform of Parameia Station, it released a plume of glittering ether into the atmosphere. That puff of shining smoke signified that the train had come to a complete shutdown, and it was safe to disembark.

“Well then, let’s get going, Touya. Or should I say, Grand Duke.”

“Mmm... Guess I gotta do it...”

“Do your best!” as I stood with Duke Ortlinde, waiting for the door to open, Frei called out to me with words of encouragement.

Yep... Your dad’s gonna try his best out there...

“Welcome, Grand Duke Brunhild, Duke Ortlinde. Welcome to Parameia.”

Once we got off the train, we were greeted by a well-dressed gentleman. It was Count Parames. I’d seen his face before at a party in Belfast, so it was nice to finally see the land he ruled over.

“Apologies for the short notice, Count Parames.”

“Not at all. This is a national project of the highest importance! Why, I believe this train of yours should bring tourists from all over the place to my humble home. If anything, I should be thanking you,” Count Parames responded, nodding and smiling.

He was right. It would only take a few hours from either side to reach Parameia by train, whereas the only method of arrival previously was several days in a bumpy carriage. This would no doubt improve the local tourism economy quite a bit.

I glanced over to the other side of the platform, at the track that stretched out opposite to the one we’d ridden in on.

That was, naturally, the track that spanned from Refreese to Belfast. There was another train departing from Refreese at the exact same time as ours, so we’d likely see it pass us later on. Count Parames would have to welcome the Refreesian delegation once they

eventually showed up too. He definitely had a busy day ahead of him, that was for sure.

Some passengers got off the train, while others boarded it from Parameia's platform. This maiden voyage wasn't just for nobles, there were a handful of commoners who had gotten the right to ride as well, though they were obviously separated from the VIP passengers. The tickets that were handed out to random members of the public had different destinations on them, and the shortest ride ended in Parameia. My ticket was for a round trip, so I could just ride back from Refreese later on if I felt like it.

"Oh, we're running short on time. Here's a variety of specialties from my territory. I hope you enjoy them."

"Oh, thank you so much."

Count Parames handed me a box of snacks, which I hurriedly stuffed into **[Storage]**.

Nice, wasn't expecting some souvenirs. Is this some kind of advertising tactic? Whatever it is, I'm sold!

"Lunch boxes! Get your lunch boxes here! Drinks and refreshments!"

"Hm?" I mumbled as I turned toward the sound of the voice and saw a vendor with a large signboard yelling out from one of the train carriages. Apparently, there was a whole train car dedicated to selling food and drinks.

Wow, they even have that? I remember casually mentioning that around King Belfast and Emperor Refreese...but I didn't think they'd actually pull the trigger on it so soon.

Various passengers walked over to the vendor carriage's window, buying all kinds of foods for the sheer novelty of it. Or perhaps they were just getting food while they could, since as far as I knew, there were no active food sales while the train was moving.

“Lu-dono, I would like a bento-style box, I would!”

“Mama Lu, can I get the chicken sandwich?!”

“Mother Lu, here’s the money! O-Oh, wait! We need to hurry up or it’ll sell out!”

“Please wait your turn! Why do I have to deal with this, anyway?!”

I could hear various voices from the window of the carriage I’d just stepped out of. It belonged to a group of hungry individuals from my family.

Are they gonna buy food for everyone? With Frei and Yae there, I’m sure that means over twenty orders... Couldn’t they just pull some food out from [Storage] if they’re that hungry? Or do they want to try out the novelty of train food?

“I’d best be going then. Thanks for meeting us, Count Parames.”

“Yes, thank you for the present. We’ll be off now.”

“By all means! Have a wonderful trip.”

After exchanging farewells, Duke Ortlinde and I headed back to our train car. A whistle sounded off and the doors closed behind us soon after. That glittering residue began to gather in the air again as the magic train slowly started to chug its way out of the station.

I waved at everyone on the platform, and they waved back at the train.

Once Duke Ortlinde and I returned to our seats, we found everyone sitting at the side table, looking ready to eat their meals.

You’re starting without us?!

“Here you go, Touya. This one’s yours.”

“Oh, nice. Thanks, Yumina,” I replied with a smile as I took my boxed lunch. It was a cardboard box that was flimsily snapped shut. I

opened it up to reveal a tasty-looking burger. It was in a bun with veggies.

Everyone else had some kind of sandwich or hot dog. It made me think about cultures that used a lot of bread. This was probably a normal lunch for them.

I bit into my burger, and the delicious taste of the meat spread through my mouth, with the flavor of the juicy tomatoes following shortly after.

This is a bird, I think... Definitely poultry, but what kind? Is it chicken? Kind of tastes like chicken. It's probably not chicken, though.

It didn't really matter what the meat was. It tasted good, and that was all I needed to stay happy.

"Dad, can I have that fruit?"

"This one? Sure."

Over in the corner seat, Allis was taking some kind of strawberry from Ende. He was technically here to act as a guard, but I wasn't about to tell him to stop eating with his kid. Besides, it was more than reasonable to let him take a meal break. We weren't running some kind of shady enterprise here.

"Look, mother! A bridge!" Yoshino yelled and almost tossed her sandwich into the air as she pointed out at an elevated railway track suspended over a small lake.

"Mhm... It's amazing..."

I couldn't help but wonder how much it would've cost to make something like it back on Earth... Magic sure was versatile. The mages who made the track probably barely had any issue manipulating the terrain in this way.

Yumina looked at the bridge, then turned to me and said, “They’re in the middle of building the line from Belfast to Mismede, aren’t they?”

“Mhm. They finished the bridge over the Great Gau River the other day. I think it’ll open a few months from now. They’re working on Belfast to Regulus and Felsen to Lestia as well. I think most of the nations in our alliance are going to be connected before long.”

There were some issues, however, like how connecting Nokia to Xenoahs required going through what used to be Yulong... That probably wouldn’t be so easy. Or rather, a direct line between Nokia and Xenoahs could be achieved without cutting through Yulong, but connecting those nations to any others without cutting through that territory was impossible.

Yulong no longer existed as a nation, so it’d probably be fine to build a track, but who knew what the locals would think of it. They’d probably devolved into tribal societies who claimed patches of land or something. No country would want to run a railway track through such a miserable country anyway. It would just be bad news. If we had to, we could probably get some kind of track running over the sea, like the bridge that connected Roadmare, Lestia, Ryle, and Felsen.

“We have airship technology thanks to western science. Maybe we could just adopt that instead.”

“It’s possible, but I personally feel that trains are a much more efficient form of travel. Airships also have adverse weather conditions to contend with.”

Quun had a point. Trains wouldn’t just be for people, they’d also be hauling supplies and resources. Airships couldn’t carry half as much freight as a train. If we could improve the global supply chain, then

everyone's lives would become much better. That was one of the whole points behind introducing the train in the first place.

"Will there be a station in Brunhild?"

"Yeah. On the route between Belfast and Regulus. It should be smack bang in the middle of the two places."

"That'll mean an increase in tourism."

I wasn't sure how to feel about that, in all honesty. Brunhild's capital wasn't exactly the size of other capitals. We had plenty of tourists as it was, but not nearly enough beds to house them all. The promise of more visitors probably meant we'd have to increase border security as well.

"Is there even anything for tourists to do in Brunhild? Do we have much in the way of landmarks?" I said, tapping my chin as I began to think.

Refreese's capital had its beautiful sea and pure white architecture. Belfast's capital had striking vistas and a magnificent lakeside. We had...

"We have a clock tower, I guess?"

"A clock tower... I'm not so sure that's much of a draw."

"Uhhh...we have Frame Gears?"

"Is that really something we can consider a landmark, though?"

They were kind of a landmark. You couldn't find them anywhere else, after all.

I'm not sure how to make a giant robot into a landmark... Then again, I'm pretty sure that's been done in Japan. I remember seeing a full-sized replica from that one anime... But, well, I guess landmarks are more things like Tokyo Tower or the Skytree. Or stuff like shrines, historical sites, and big amusement parks. There's an amusement

park under construction in Brunhild right now, I guess? That'll definitely bring people in. Oh yeah, there are the Dungeon Islands too. I keep forgetting about those.

Adventurers from nearby regions often came to Brunhild for the lucrative opportunities, so maybe the train would bring in adventurers from further away. Train rides probably wouldn't be cheap, though, so maybe not.

We're definitely gonna need more accommodations for visitors. Maybe I should commission a third Silvermoon Inn branch?

Whatever the case, we needed more hands on deck. I probably needed to open recruitment for more knights too.

"Hmm... Quun said we'll have knight Golems deployed in the future... I guess that'll help a bit with the manpower issues."

"Fu fu... You're worrying about work even while traveling? Don't you want to relax a little?"

"Yeah, you're right... I wish I could."

Yumina's words made me sigh a little. I definitely needed to start enjoying my trip instead of worrying so much. The problems would still be there for me to deal with later on, anyway.

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Meanwhile, near the border between Elfrau and Regulus...

"Oh, this is the Regulus Empire," the boy muttered to himself as he saw the sign by the border. He'd been riding in a carriage from Elfrau for a few days now and was finally in another country.

"Finally...no more cold."

It was the six-year-old boy, Mochizuki Kuon. He was on his way through another time, another place, trying to make it to Brunhild.

Regulus had a much less frigid climate, but he was still in the northernmost area of the country, so Kuon kept on the coat he'd bought earlier.

"Found one."

"Again? Coachman, stop at once! The boy's found us another."

One of the men riding in the carriage alongside Kuon called out to the coachman, but before he could even stop his horse, Kuon had jumped out of the side of the carriage, pulled out a bow, and fired a shot into the nearby forest.

"Hiiih?!" an animal's yelp rang out...followed by the sound of a thud. Kuon went after it and soon emerged from the bushes with a large deer carcass behind him. It had been killed with a single arrow through its head.

"Oooh! A Regulus Elk! These are quite the delicacy," one of the men said, a wide smile on his face as he walked out of the carriage, knife in hand. The other passengers came out to look at Kuon's kill as well.

"Can you strip it for meat, then?"

"Sure, I can take it from here. Naturally, I'll buy the carcass, lad."

The man was the owner of a butcher shop who was on his way back to Regulus after attending his daughter's wedding.

Traveling by carriage was usually a frugal affair when it came to eating. Typically, you'd carry dried meat or other nonperishables to consume along the road. Or you'd catch your own game if you came across any. Ordinarily, it wouldn't be so easy to find fresh meat, but the people in this carriage were finding their trip to be one abundant in fresh kills.

It was all thanks to the strange young man who was with them. He had an almost supernatural sense for detecting wild animals, and no matter where they were, he easily killed them with his flimsy bow.

Thanks to him, the passengers were able to enjoy good food as they carried on their journey.

“I’ll be good on meat for a while thanks to you, sonny. You’ve got my thanks.”

“It’s all good. I’m glad to have the money!” Kuon replied. He had figured it’d be impossible to make it to Brunhild with just the money he’d made from selling his cuff links, but at the very least, he’d be able to make it to the capital of Regulus. And if he made a little more silver along the way, what would the harm be?

The carriage continued along its path until it reached the town of Jonsth. It was the end of the line for their journey.

Jonsth was a fairly ordinary-sized town, ruled over by one of Regulus’s remote district counts. Once the boy reached the place, he immediately started looking around for a way to hitch a ride to the capital city. He went to the main station for carriages and checked the schedule, but upon seeing it, he let out a long, heavy sigh.

“Last one left a few minutes ago, huh?”

His timing had been unfortunate, as the next ride to the capital wasn’t scheduled for another two days.

“Hmm, what now? Maybe I can hitch a ride to a closer town?”

It was quite late in the evening. Dusk had almost fallen. If he took another carriage now, he’d have to live the camping lifestyle again for a few more days. Kuon decided that he wanted to stay in a proper inn, so waiting two days for a direct ride to Gallaria didn’t seem like the worst thing in the world.

“All right, that’s it, then. Let’s find an inn.”

With that, Kuon hefted up his backpack and began walking around the town. He wanted to stay in a nice place, even if it was a little pricier. Countryside inns were often a hotbed for adventurers, which

also often made them a hotbed for trouble. If at all possible, Kuon would've preferred to avoid that. And the best way to do so was to stay at the kind of inn traveling merchants stayed at, even if it was expensive. With that in mind, Kuon followed a fellow who looked like a merchant at the station. As he trailed him, he passed a street corner and saw the gentleman head into an inn down the street.

"The Silver Feather, huh?" Kuon mumbled as he looked up at the signboard with a raised brow. The place looked somewhat modern and nice, but not quite nice enough for it to be noticeably stuffy or for the upper classes. In other words, it was perfect.

Kuon took a deep breath, mentally preparing himself for the most important moment, then walked through the swing door.

"Welcome to the Silver Feather! Can I...? Hm? A little boy?"

A lone woman sat behind the counter. She looked to be in her twenties. A man was helping the merchant from earlier up the stairs nearby.

"I'd like a room, please. Two nights."

"Huh? Er...I mean...I can't just give a room to a child, now can I?"

The woman seemed a bit troubled as she looked down at Kuon. The boy responded by glaring up at her, his right eye flashing purple-gold.

"...H-Huh? Oh, my apologies. I thought you were alone. A room for two, then?"

The woman blinked slowly as she registered the image of a man in his thirties standing next to the boy...as if he'd been standing there the entire time.

"Yes. That's exactly what we need, thank you."

"That'll be two silver coins, then. Could you sign here?"

Kuon leaned in to sign on the paper. The woman at the desk thought it was a little strange that the son was signing instead of who she assumed to be his father, but she didn't ponder the matter too deeply.

"Okay, allow me to show you to your room!"

The woman stood up and walked Kuon up to a room on the second floor. It was a quaint little space with two beds, a desk with a chair, a closet, and a lightstone lamp.

"We serve breakfast, lunch, and dinner in the dining hall downstairs. Please leave the key at the counter before you leave."

"Got it. Thanks again."

"That man didn't say very much, did he? I suppose he's the taciturn type."

The woman shrugged as she said that, walked downstairs, and took her position at the desk once more.

Kuon, now alone in his room, slumped onto the bed with a sigh.

"Man, that was rough... I had a feeling she wouldn't let me stay alone, but I didn't want to stay at some shady place either..."

Nicer establishments usually had more rules about their guests, but less reputable inns didn't have as much of an issue welcoming children, so long as they could pay. Those were the kinds of places Kuon had been staying at as he made his way through Elfrau, and frankly, he'd had enough. Thus, he'd used the Mystic Eye of Phantasmagoria. It was one of Kuon's seven mystic eyes, and it had the ability to mess with people's minds, showing them visions and making them believe falsehoods. Though, since he could only conjure illusions with it, the father he'd created couldn't speak. That was why he had to do all the talking.

One might have said his method was far too convoluted, that he could've just made the enchantment make him look like an adult instead...but it was a purely visual trick. His voice still would've been that of a child's, and there would've been discrepancies in his height while moving around. In the end, faking the presence of an adult accompanying him was the smartest thing to do, though that also came with the unfortunate drawback of paying the cost of two people.

"Ahhh...when was the last time I had a blanket this comfy?" the boy murmured, smiling as he pulled it up against his body. It must have been freshly laundered. He snuggled up into that blanket and drifted off to sleep, thinking about his plans for the morning all the while.

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With Parames behind us, the magic train carried on northward. After heading through mountains, more forests, and some fields, we eventually arrived at our next stop. It was Sarania Station, which was situated in Saranis County.

Duke Ortlinde and I repeated the same motions we'd done at the last station, which was to get off the train and greet the local authority. This time it was Viscount Saranis, and he gave me another souvenir package. Once I finished that, the train was ready to depart again. We said our goodbyes to the viscount and carried on.

"Hm? Something smells good, it does."

The moment I entered the train car, Yae started to sniff around in an exaggerated fashion as she faced the souvenir box I was carrying.

...What is she, a hound?

"It's freshly picked fruit from the local area."

“Crystal cherries. They’re a specialty of Saranis County. They’re one of the best fruits in the world, frankly. A perfect mix of sweet and sour.”

Yumina’s words made all my children turn their hungry eyes in the direction of the box I was carrying.

Huh? You guys wanna eat it all now? Well, I guess there’s enough for everyone present...

I opened up the box to reveal several smaller boxes of different fruits. They were all different varieties of crystal cherry. One box had red ones, another had yellow ones, and a third was filled with green ones.

I picked one up and examined it in the light. It was translucent and shone brightly when held up. They were like glass, really, which was probably where they got their name. I couldn’t even see any seeds or pits inside it. It was like I was holding some kind of delicious candy... I didn’t know how they tasted, but I was already happy just looking at them.

I popped one of the red ones into my mouth.

Mmm! Delicious! It’s kinda like the cherries I’m familiar with, but this one’s way nicer!

I tried the yellow one next and found it to be much sweeter.

Oho, this one’s yummy too... Now let’s try the green...

“No faiir, dad! I wanna try too!”

“That’s right, daddy. We want some as well.”

“Me too, Grand Duke! Please!”

I almost got lost in a world of flavor before Linne, Yoshino, and Allis dragged me out of it with their complaints.

After hearing them complain, I set the three boxes down on the table in the middle of the train car and quietly despaired as tiny hands snatched just about all of them away.

“This is delicious, it is. What a dignified flavor.”

“We could probably use these for confectionery, I think.”

“Actually, mother, desserts made from crystal cherries already exist. Though they’re somewhat expensive.”



My kids were greedily chowing down on the cherries. And not just the children, but the wives and guests too. They were like animals. Fortunately, Duke Ortlinde could sense my misery, so he quietly handed a few cherries over to me from his own stash.

“Sorry about this...”

“Ha ha ha, worry not. Viscount Saranis gives us boxes of these at the start of every year. It’s no great loss.”

This world also seemed to prioritize the idea of giving gifts toward the end of the year. Given that Duke Ortlinde was a noble, he probably got a lot of things from a lot of contacts.

Sadly, it didn’t take long for the crystal cherries to vanish entirely. Given how many of us there were, that was only natural. Though, that didn’t stop me from wishing I could’ve had some more.

Hilde quietly muttered to herself as she savored the final cherry, saying, “If the magic trains become more well established, will we be able to have these cherries in Brunhild?”

“It’d revolutionize the supply chain, I think. Even with just this train track, fish caught in Refreese can be in Belfast in a matter of hours. It’s gonna change the face of cuisine for a lot of places. There’ll only be limited quantities, though...so the fish will probably be pricey.”

Up until this point, towns far from the oceans could only eat river fish, if even that. If they wanted to eat saltwater fish, it’d only really be commonly available in dried or preserved form. There were no fresh options.

I didn’t think fresh fish would become immediately available to average households, but as the number of trains increased, the supply chain was bound to improve as well.

I guess timekeeping's probably gonna become more important across society too. They have clocks on the western continent, so I should probably look into getting them introduced over here as well... Maybe we can start rolling out watches? Wait, if we have watches then we can...

"Hm? What's that?" Yumina suddenly broke into my mind palace with a comment, sending me hurtling back to reality.

I turned my gaze off into the distance and narrowed my eyes, scanning across the vast field.

Hm? I don't see anything... Wait, no...there's something moving, it's just really hard to see because of the distance.

"I think it's a monster... It looks like it's chasing something? Not a person, though... Hm..."

"I'll check it out... Hold on... **[Long Sense]**."

Yumina was a sniper, so she had a well-trained eye, but not even she could fully make out the scene in the distance. Once I used my magic, the tiny speck immediately became bigger to me.

Yep, that's a monster all right. A beast-type. Looks like a giant rhino to me... Wait, this thing's a Rhinobash, I think. I saw it in a guild field guide once. It's a red-rank monster, if I recall properly. It's massive, but...what's it charging after? Let's see...

"Oh, this is bad. It's chasing after a carriage and it's about to catch up."

"What?! We have to help them!" Yumina exclaimed, rising to her feet in a panic.

Yep, I've gotta help them. Shouldn't be too hard to make a quick pit stop out there with my magic. No big deal.

I waved over to Ende.

"Yo, Ende. If something happens, you come too, okay?"

“Oh, sure. I’ll wait here until then.”

“Gotcha. Okay... **[Telep...**”

Right as I was in the middle of casting my spell, two small individuals jumped in from the side and grabbed me.

“...ort]?!”

I instantly shifted right next to the carriage being pursued, directly in front of the headlong charging path of the Rhinobash. But it wasn’t just me. Linne and Allis were clinging to my sides.

What the hell?!

“What’d you guys come for?!”

“It’s okay, dad! We’ve got this!”

“That’s right, we’ll take it out!”

“That’s not what I was asking! Hey, wait!”

The two kids cheerily ignored me as they turned and charged toward the Rhinobash.

Ugh... You two have way too much energy!

The carriage went hurtling past us and I caught a glimpse of a terrified man inside. It looked to be a merchant’s carriage. The Rhinobash had probably been drawn in by the scent of food.

“Let’s gooo!” Linne roared as she blasted forward, meeting the Rhinobash in a catastrophic head-on clash. But with Linne being so small, even though she had a good grip on the creature, it still pushed her back.

“[Gravity]!”

“GRAAARGH!”

I heard a sickening crunch as the Rhinobash’s knees tensed up and were forced to a halt. Linne had activated weight-manipulation

magic, transforming herself into an immovable object. The poor Rhinobash struggled in vain, clearly having no idea what was going on.

Right after that, Allis came charging in from behind. She leaped over Linne's head and extended her arms toward the Rhinobash.

"Prisma Rose!"

Vines of crystal grew from Allis's right arm, coalescing in the form of a massive machete at the end.

The Rhinobash had already run out of strength, leaving it a sitting target for Allis, who was sailing through the air and swinging her weapon down at it.

"Prisma Guillotine!"

"BRAUUUH?!"

The Rhinobash was decapitated in seconds, its head falling to the ground at about the same time as its body.

"We did it, Allis!"

"Great work, Linne!"

The two of them did a little dance, then gave each other a high five.

Linne turned to me with a big smile on her face and said, "See that, dad? We didn't even ruin it! The guild'll buy this for sure!"

"Oh... Yeah, that's right. Great job."

Rhinobash leather was good material for armor. Cleanly decapitating it was a smart move, all things considered. The best way to kill it would've involved not slashing through the skin at all, but they'd still done pretty well. We'd definitely fetch a good price for this carcass from the guild, that much was assured.

I hurriedly put the Rhinobash corpse into **[Storage]**, then looked around for the carriage it was chasing. I couldn't see it anywhere, so it had likely fled. That was fine by me, since I needed to get back to the train anyway.

I realized it would be hard to return to the train with **[Teleport]**, since it was constantly moving, so I opted for **[Gate]** instead.

“**[Gate]**.”

We passed through the portal and appeared on the train without any issues.

“Good job, Touya.”

“Well, I didn't actually do much...”

I could only shrug my shoulders a bit as Yumina flashed me a supportive smile. She was the only one on the train who would've been able to see what happened, so I appreciated her trying to boost my confidence.

“That was a lot of fun!”

“Mhm! A ton!”

Just as Linne and Allis started to celebrate, two shadows loomed over them from behind.

“Fun, was it...? Could we talk for a second, Linne?”

“Allis... Dad wants to have a few words...”

“O-Oh no...”

“Eep!”

Linze and Ende grabbed their respective kids by the arms and dragged them away for a stern talking to. It was understandable, all things considered.

Yumina handed me a cup of tea, so I took it and sat back down to relax.

Linze and Ende nagged at their respective children until we got to the next station. Both Linne and Allis seemed terribly uncomfortable as they were forced to sit on the floor and repent. I had no sympathy for them, myself. They were reaping what they'd sown.

The next stop after Sarania Station was Lancelet Station, deep in Lancelo County. Earl Lancelo owned this territory, and it was the last stop within Belfast. After this, we'd be heading straight into Refreese.

Much like we had in the previous two stations, we disembarked to greet the local lord and received a gift from him. To my kid's disappointment, however, the gift was a selection of beautiful fabrics and textiles.

Linze and Elna seemed quite taken by the selection, though, and they quickly began to talk about what kind of things they'd be able to make with the materials.

"Oh! A tunnel!"

Just as Sue let out her cry, the entire train fell into darkness. The only light afforded to us was the dim glow of the interior lightstone fittings. The tunnel stretched on for quite a while. There was nothing but pitch black outside the windows, and the glass showed us nothing but reflections of ourselves. Every now and then we could see lights that had been installed in the tunnel, streaking like meteors as we whizzed on by.

"My ears feel strange, they do," Yae said as she frowned a bit and placed her fingers up to the sides of her head. The air pressure in the tunnel must have been affecting her eardrums.

We still had a while to go yet. I knew that for a fact because I was the one who had dug it out.

The Suloncia Mountains straddled the border between Refreese and Belfast. It would've taken a long time to travel around them. That was why I used Earth magic to dig out a tunnel, then the **[Stone Wall]** spell to smooth out and reinforce the interior. I'd designed it with the Seikan Tunnel from back in Japan in mind. The magic I'd used on it was strong enough that I had no reason to think it wouldn't last at least a few thousand years.

I only dug the tunnel out and reinforced it, though. I left everything else like the installation of the lights, the leveling of the ground, and the other stuff to the two countries. Plus, I got paid a nice commission fee.

"It's so dark... This is no fun," Frei grumbled as she looked out the window. She didn't seem impressed by the monotonous black or the occasional glimmer of light.

There wasn't much I could do to help. We had to slow down in here because it was a tunnel, and that meant it'd take at least another twenty minutes to reach the other side.

Yumina suddenly turned to me and asked, "Do you think it would be possible to make an underground train in our world? Like that subwait from yours?"

"Subway, you mean. And yeah, I think it might be possible...but it'd cost a lot in terms of labor and construction fees. I'd also be a bit worried about landslides and cave-ins."

An advantage of a subway system was that you could run trains beneath existing habitats without disrupting any existing buildings, but obviously, it took a lot of infrastructural planning to make such a thing possible.

For one, even with the power of Earth magic on our side, it would take a countless number of regular mages to carve out underground

tunnels. There were also safety measures to take into account as well.

I heard it cost an obscene amount of money to build even one kilometer of subway track back on Earth, so I couldn't even begin to imagine what it might take to start establishing it in this world.

I could've probably made a subway in Brunhild fairly easily, but I brought the idea up with Kousaka and he shot me down. He told me that if I did it, I'd be depriving our nation of a potential national project. In other words, he'd approve the subway only when the systems were in place for everyone in Brunhild who wanted to contribute to do so.

Oh? Is that a light I see up ahead? The exit, maybe?

"It's the sea!"

The first thing we saw on the other side of the tunnel was the sight of water spread out along the horizon. It was the inland sea situated between Belfast and Refreese. It glimmered in the sun, shining a dazzling blue. Looking into the distance, we spotted a handful of fishing villages along the coast.

Seeing the spectacular view made the dull tunnel ride completely worth it.

"We should go swimming sometime, at the beach!"

"Yeah! Let's go soon!"

"Oh, that sounds fun. It's been a while since I've been to the beach."

Linne and Quun seemed very receptive to Hilde's suggestion.

A beach trip, huh? That sounds fun. Wouldn't take long if we headed to the dungeon islands for one either.

Still, I wanted to wait until everyone was here. I didn't think I'd have to wait that long... Surely not a year. After all, Yakumo was already guaranteed to be here, so the others couldn't be far behind.

"I wonder where Yakumo is... Hope she comes home to us soon."

She could use **[Gate]**, so there wasn't really anything stopping her. I could only assume she was keeping her distance for some important reason.

"Good grief... She will be sorry, she will. Making her mother worry is a punishable offense, it is..."

Upon hearing Yae's muttering, all the kids nervously backed away from her, instinctively placing their hands near their behinds.

Ha ha ha... I bet they've all had their fair share of spankings from Yae in the future. Hell, she's even spanked Doc Babylon before, so this doesn't surprise me at all.

"Yakumo is one thing, she is, but I am also concerned for our son, I am... I hope he has not fallen into any danger or gotten himself tricked."

Yae had a point. Either Yumina or Sue had a son, and he still wasn't here. It was a matter worth getting concerned over.

Allis, however, seemed completely unfazed. She puffed her chest out and smirked wide as she said, "Kuon getting tricked? Hah! That's impossible! He'll know who to trust and who not to trust thanks to his mystic e— Bweeeehghghf?!"

All of my kids suddenly rushed over to Allis and attempted to slap their hands over her mouth.

...What was that just now? Mystic eye? Able to know who to trust and who not to trust? That sounds awfully familiar...

Yumina must've had the same line of thought. She shakily stood up and began walking toward Allis. The kids, who were surrounding

Allis, all parted to the left and right as Yumina stepped forward. It was almost as if I was watching Moses part the Red Sea.

“...Allis?”

“Eep?”

Yumina crouched down and placed her hands on the small girl’s shoulders. Ende was about to say something, but he immediately shut his mouth once Yumina narrowed her eyes in his direction. Presumably, he was able to sense the danger emanating from her glare.

That’s it, Ende... Probably a smart idea.

“So...did you mean what I think you meant?”

“E-Eeeeeek...”

Yumina’s words were quiet, but they carried immense pressure. Allis was trapped like a rat.

We all had a good idea of what it was she’d meant, which was why I wasn’t surprised when she gave a meek nod.

“Hmph... Kuon is Touya and Yumina’s son? That’s a shame.”

“H-He’s my son!”

Sue grumbled a bit and puffed out her cheeks as Yumina punched her hand into the air and celebrated.

So my kid with Yumina has a mystic eye? Interesting.

“Aaagh... We got found out...”

“What do you expect? Allis is terrible at this.”

“Ughhh... I’m sorry... I just don’t think when Kuon comes up...”

Frei and Yoshino shook their heads at Allis. I was personally thankful to Ende’s kid for not being able to shut up. She’d taught us plenty.

“Touya! It’s our son! My son! The heir to Brunhild!”

“Yeah, I know, calm down...”

“Calm down?! How can I calm down after learning this?! The one who’ll take the throne someday was born from me! Me!”

Our kid wasn’t even born yet, but Yumina’s excitement showed no sign of settling. She was the first grand duchess of Brunhild anyway, so it didn’t really matter. Though I could imagine there was some kind of internal, unspoken pressure from her family to produce the national heir or something.

“But Kuon has a mystic eye, you said? Is it the same one Yumina has?”

“It’s not exactly the same, no...but I wouldn’t worry about that for now,” Quun answered my question, though it didn’t really answer my question at all. What did she mean?

“It’s fine, father... You’ll find out once Kuon arrives.”

“Hmph.”

Damn you... Why can’t you be as loose-lipped as Allis? I’m not asking for much here...

“Then my child with you is a daughter, hm? That’s fine by me, of course. I’m sure she’ll be incredibly cute.”

Sue didn’t seem all that disappointed by the news. She honestly seemed happy for Yumina. The prospect of having a child with her was something that troubled me... I hadn’t even gotten physically intimate with her yet, after all.

I wondered who was older, though... Kuon or Sue’s daughter.

“Is Sue’s daughter the youngest?”

“Er, well...it’s probably obvious...”

“...Yeah, that makes sense.”

Elze turned and asked Elna, who gave the answer one would expect. It definitely made sense...and that meant Kuon had seven older sisters and one younger sister. I couldn't help but pity the kid.

Just as I was quietly pitying my yet-unborn son, I felt someone tap me on the shoulder.

"Er... Sorry. What is this about? Sue's...daughter?" Duke Ortlinde asked as he glanced around the train car, looking equally as confused as he did nervous.

...Aw crap.

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"Th-These children are all Touya's? From the future?"

"Oh, all of them except Allis. She's Ende's."

After some deliberation, I decided to tell Duke Ortlinde and his wife Ellen the truth. I was planning to tell them whenever Sue's kid turned up anyway, so it was no big deal... I just hadn't expected to do it so soon.

"Hmm... They do bear an uncanny resemblance to your brides, I must admit. But could they really be from some far-flung future?"

After I told him everything, the kids deactivated the **[Mirage]** enchantments that had them looking plainer. They looked so much like their respective mothers when standing by them that it was just about impossible to deny they were related.

"Hmm... I must admit, them referring to you as father and whatnot did have me confused."

Ugh, I knew it... He had some suspicions to begin with. But I couldn't tell my kids not to call me dad, could I? That would be a bit much...

"S-So wait, where is Sue's daughter?"

“Oh, well...I’m not really sure about that, father. Yae’s daughter, my daughter, and Yumina’s son haven’t arrived in Brunhild yet. They’re somewhere out there, I think.”

“What?! I-Is she safe?!”

Duke Ortlinde and Ellen both looked horrified upon hearing Sue’s words. Ed, who was sleeping in Ellen’s arms, began to gently stir as well.

“It’s fine, really. All of our kids are gold or silver adventurers.”

“What?! Wait...how old is Sue’s daughter, exactly?” Duke Ortlinde asked, narrowing his eyes as Sue turned to Allis.

“Allis, how old is my daughter?”

“How old? Steph’s a year younger than me, so she’s, uh, let’s see... Five!”

“Hoh... So my daughter’s named Steph, is she?”

“Awah?!” Allis panicked and placed a hand over her own mouth.



The kids all glared at her, while Ende sighed and patted her on the head.

...Careless as ever, I see. Not that I mind. Thanks for the tip!

“Steph! That’s a lovely name. What’s her full name? Stephanie?”

“No! I’m not saying more!” Allis grumbled as she crossed her arms and turned away from us.

Aw, c’mon.

“It’s Stephania, father,” Arcia smiled over at me as she spoke in Allis’s place.

Stephania, huh...? So Steph’s just for short. Neat.

“Five, you say? I don’t care if she’s a silver or gold adventurer at all! How can she be safe at that age?”

“It’s okay. Of all us sisters, she’s the most defensively-oriented. Nobody can lay a finger on her.”

Duke Ortlinde seemed anxious, but Frei simply chuckled as she spoke.

*The most defensively-oriented? But Linne uses **[Shield]**. Does that mean...?*

“She has **[Prison]** on her side.”

“Oh.”

[Prison] was an incredible spell that could deploy a safe zone around you with all manner of conditions. It would even stay active while you slept. With that spell on her side, there was nothing she couldn’t protect herself from.

“She has **[Accel]** too. Very useful for her.”

“She can even use that? Wow...”

Impregnable defenses and perfectly honed senses... She was probably the safest five-year-old in the world no matter where she was.

“She doesn’t use [Accel] to run away, though.”

“Yeah, she just uses it for the Stephrocket all the time.”

Quun and Linne were discussing something interesting. What the hell was a Stephrocket, exactly?

“It’s her ultimate attack. She combined [Prison] with [Accel] to turn herself into a living missile.”

“A mighty ramming attack, yep.”

Elna and Yoshino explained the rest.

That’s insane... Then again, Sue always had a habit of hug-tackling me... Guess this is a case of ‘like mother, like daughter,’ huh?

I couldn’t read the expressions on the faces of Duke Ortlinde and his wife. They probably had mixed feelings about learning all this about a grandchild they’d yet to even meet.

“Have you told my brother?”

“Not yet, no. I was going to wait until Yumina and Sue’s kids arrived before telling you both. The leaders of Regulus, Lestia, and Xenoahs know about it, though.”

“Well, I certainly wouldn’t have believed it without seeing... I’m still struggling to believe it, even. But the thought of my granddaughter lost out there does make me anxious...and excited.”

“Me too. What kind of child is Steph? Does she take after Sue? Is she quite energetic?”

Both the duke and Ellen were clearly eager to learn more. The Stephrocket thing had me thinking she was probably pretty active. She was likely quite the tomboy.

“Please don’t tell King Belfast about this just yet. We plan to tell him when Yumina’s son, Kuon, arrives.”

“I see... So Yumina will bear the heir, then. No wonder she was so excited. Congratulations, Yumina.”

“Thank you, uncle!” Yumina replied, beaming as Duke Ortlinde congratulated her. She was already like this and she hadn’t even met the kid yet... I was legitimately worried about how she would behave when Kuon eventually showed his face.

“What’s my son like, anyway? Is he smart? Cool? Kind? Gentle? Good with girls? Obedient to his parents?! Respectful to his elders?! Polite?! Well-learned?! A good student?!”

“E-Erm... Umm... Ahhh...”

“Stop! You’re gonna make Elna’s head explode. I know you’re excited, Yumina, but you’ve gotta calm down.”

Poor Elna seemed to be at her breaking point in the face of Yumina’s rapid-fire questioning. Fortunately for her, Elze was there to save her.

“Come on... Let’s wait until you meet him, okay? He might feel awkward if you know so much about him in advance.”

“Ugh... I want him to come home soon...”

I had to step in and talk Yumina down a little, but she was clearly growing impatient. It’d been a while since Yoshino had shown up, so surely the next kid wouldn’t be much longer.

Frankly, I hoped that Yakumo would be the next one to appear, if only because if she kept Yae waiting any longer, she’d be guaranteed a hard spanking. I didn’t want to see that happen to my daughter right after meeting her, so I quietly hoped that Kuon and Steph would only appear after her.

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Her katana swung through the air, blood splashing off its blade. She sheathed it, triggering the **[Clean]** enchantment, rendering it free from imperfection.

“You’re strong, lass. Taking out a whole group of bandits on your own? That’s nothing to sniff at...”

The professor looked at the fallen men, letting out a sigh of mixed relief and concern. The two of them had come to Isengard by way of Gardio’s port, but there was no way for them to catch a ride to the ruined former capital city of Isenberg. Thus, they’d elected to head there on foot, only to run into a group of bandits.

Once Isengard started to collapse, it wasn’t long before people like them began to overrun the wilderness. With nobody left to stop them, they banded together and began using ruined forts and other places as their bases of operations.

About fifty or so bandits had attacked Yakumo and her companion...and just about all of them had fallen to her blade.

“This is strange, it i— Er... This is strange, isn’t it? These people didn’t seem to be in their right minds at all. They were saying such strange things, as well... Could this be...?” Yakumo mumbled as she rummaged through one of the men’s pockets, finding a tattered wallet. The sight caused the professor to wrinkle his nose in distaste.

“Not quite right to loot the fallen, young lady... If you’re that desperate for money, I could always give you some.”

“Th-That’s not it at all! I’m not taking his wallet because I need the money!” Yakumo roared, hurriedly explaining herself. She was looking for something in particular. And sure enough, she’d found it.

“Hm? What’s this? Some kind of medicine?” the professor asked, raising a brow as Yakumo held up a small packet she’d found in the man’s wallet. She then opened it up, revealing trace amounts of golden powder.

“Gold dust? No, the color seems a touch murkier...”

“This is a supposed miracle cure made from the branches of the puretree... But that’s not what it is at all. In truth, it’s a toxin that makes one succumb to their base instincts. It causes aggression, heavy mood swings...and eventually, death.”

“What?! And this kind of thing is just out on the market?!”

One of the bandits who’d attacked them was babbling something quietly as he stared up at the sky. No matter how you looked at him, he was clearly not thinking straight. The drugs had already worn away at him, body and soul. He didn’t have long to live.

“The goldflower pox is running rampant around Isengard, it seems. There are many here who have succumbed to the allure of the golden medicine.”

“Hm... I’d wonder what the country is doing to combat it, but there’s no country left to speak of...” the professor muttered as he frowned quietly.

The person Yakumo had met, the one in the diving suit, had called themselves one of the wicked devout. This medicine surely had something to do with them. And it was clearly in circulation in the ruins of Isengard. Plus, it had even reached the neighboring nations of Lassei, Gardio, Strain, and Orphen...

In truth, the spread was so intense that Yakumo had no idea if she could even solve it anymore. But at the very least, she knew she couldn’t return home until she had some meaningful information about the origin of the problem.

“We’re almost at Isenberg now. If we can get there, we’ll be able to return in a flash,” Yakumo said, speaking to herself as she walked down the road. She’d already told the professor about her **[Gate]** spell, so in the worst-case scenario, they only had to reach the ruined capital and then they’d be able to go back. Whether or not she’d

immediately return to Brunhild upon reaching their destination was still up in the air, though.

After another half a day of walking, they saw large impact craters in the ground that were remnants of the battle between Yakumo's father and the wicked god. The professor couldn't hold back his amazement as he stared at the craters.

"Good gods above... What manner of battle could've caused this?"

Yakumo didn't really know, to be honest. That was only natural, of course, since the fight had happened long before she was born. Still, she knew it had been a fierce one, and that it was the wicked god who had ravaged the landscape.

They passed the craters and began heading into the former residential areas...or at least, what they assumed must have been them. The center of the city was dead and frozen, while the outskirts were crumbling and in complete shambles. The difference between the two places was staggering.

"My, it's hard to walk around with all these crumbling walls..."

"Best to stay away from the taller ones. You never know what building might fall next."

This was once a proud city that was at the forefront of magitech research, but not a shadow of that remained anymore. The only things that even hinted at the place's former glory were the scattered fragments of rusted metal and chunks of blasted stone.

Every now and then they'd pass wrecked Golems and dead creatures trapped beneath the rubble. There weren't many human bodies, of course. Most of the people who had lived here had evacuated back when the witch-king activated his enormous Golem, and there were barely any people living here by the time of Yakumo's father's fight against the wicked god.

“Hmm...”

“What is it, lass?”

“Shh... Quiet, a moment...”

Yakumo, who was walking ahead, suddenly ducked into the shade of a nearby structure. The professor, along with his soldat Golem attendants, followed quickly after her.

“I thought I sensed something... Wait there!” Yakumo roared. Her line of sight trailed toward a nearby building, where a monster seemed to be lurking. It wasn’t quite apt to call this thing a monster, however. It had bat-like wings and a long, leathery tail. Its entire body was covered in black armor plating. Two gnarled horns sprouted from its head. Its face was blank and featureless, with the smooth sheen of a freshly-peeled hard-boiled egg.

“A devil...?”

Devils were creatures from the Netherrealm that could be pulled into this world via summoning magic. The strength of the devil depended on the might of the summoner, but summoning a more powerful devil required far more complicated rituals.

Yakumo carefully scanned the nearby area for any signs of the summoner, but there was nobody to be found. The girl was working solely on instinct, but she assumed the devil in front of her wasn’t very strong. It was probably from a lower rank on the hierarchy.

“A devil, you say? I’ve never encountered such a creature before... What strange wings.”

The professor was born on the western continent when it was still the Reverse World, so it was only natural that he’d be unused to such things as summoning magic. But the remark about the wings wasn’t solely due to that ignorance. It was because the wings were distinctly mechanical.

The devil's forearms were also mechanical in nature, as were its legs from the knee down. It appeared to be some manner of hybrid creature. An unholy fusion of Golem and devil.

If Yakumo's father were here, he would've surely remarked something like, "Wow. A cyborg."

The devil seemed to have no more business in the area. It spun around and began to leave.

"Professor, you wait here. I'm going to follow it."

"Okay. Be careful, then."

Yakumo crouched down low and left the shade of the building. She'd been taught how to best hide her presence from a young age, and her teacher had been one of the best in that regard: Tsubaki, the head of Brunhild's intelligence corps.

She skulked in the shadows, following after the devil-golem as it went on its way. After a time, the creature reached what appeared to be a ruined factory. Though the glass of its windows was shattered, and its steel affectations were rusted over, it still looked far sturdier than the surrounding structures.

Yakumo quickly circled the building in search of a back entrance, as she knew it'd be riskier to follow the devil in through the front.

She cautiously peeked through the broken remains of a window. The interior was dark, save for a few spots of light that peeked in from holes in the ceiling.

"Is that—?!" Yakumo trailed off, her eyes going wide as she saw what was in the middle of the factory floor.

There were various talismans stuck up all over the inside of the building, but the most eye-catching part of all was the thing that seemed to be enshrined right in the middle. It looked like some kind of large insect. Or, to be more specific, an ant. What it resembled

most was a sculpture of an ant with a muddy, stony surface. Cracks ran along it, giving it the impression of something that had experienced severe wear and tear.

It stood upon a large metal stand, and although Yakumo couldn't make it out very clearly from her vantage point, the stand seemed to have various magical runes inscribed on it. The purpose of such inscriptions was entirely unknown to her, however.

"Is that...one of the wicked god's servants? One of those...mutants I heard about?" Yakumo questioned herself silently. She had never seen the wicked god before, and she'd only heard stories of the mutant army it had mustered from her parents. If there was any video evidence of the situation, Yakumo wished she'd asked her father to show it to her, but it was a bit late for that now.

The sight before her matched what her mother had said about the mutants, though. Yae had told her that once the wicked god fell, all the mutants lost their golden luster and turned to stone. But if this truly was the remains of a mutant, then what was that devil doing with it? As far as she could tell, it was dead, or at least no more capable of movement or thought than any other statue.

"Hm..." Yakumo mumbled as she got lost in thought. She saw multiple devils in the factory. Most of them looked identical to the one she'd followed, but there was one individual who was visually distinct from them.

It was a woman. Her outfit bore a striking resemblance to the one worn by Leen, one of Yakumo's mothers...but this specific take on the ensemble was far more risqué and glamorous. The most provocative feature was that the corset was bound tight, emphasizing the woman's bust. She wore a metal domino mask on her face, obscuring her expression and making it hard to read her features. Her long, wavy red hair was bundled up messily. She had

long legs clad in lace stockings that jutted out from her short skirt and a garter at her thigh.

A word came to mind when looking at her, but Yakumo dared not utter it.

Harlot.

Yet despite her gaudy, feminine attire, there was a beastly, uneven-looking mace at her waist. It seemed to emanate a faint orange glow. Her entire vibe was eerily similar to that of the individual in the diving suit that Yakumo had met earlier. Though she had no way of knowing for sure, she instinctively felt that this was one of the wicked devout.

“Hmph... Quite a bit of work this, isn’t it? But it’s work that must be done nonetheless,” the woman in the iron mask said as she lifted the mace at her waist high and brought it ruthlessly swinging down toward the mutant statue.

Yakumo would have expected the entire thing to shatter under the strike, but it didn’t. Instead, it merely cracked and dented.

“And here, and there, and there, and here!” the woman exclaimed as she began to rhythmically beat at the statue with her mace. The mutant gradually lost its form, like a lump of clay being beaten down. It was hit from side to side, from top to bottom, until it was reduced to a formless lump of stone. It was struck repeatedly until it became the size of a baseball. It was as if it was being compressed.

The mace kept picking up speed as it smacked and hammered against the now-floating orb. The orange light it emitted flared outward and filled the factory. Eventually, it all came to an end...and the tiny stone ball glowed with a muddy golden sheen.

“Haaagh!” the masked woman roared as she delivered one final swing of her mace, thrashing the orb so hard that it should have been completely pulverized... And yet, it wasn’t destroyed. It had

been turned into some kind of sparkling golden dust that had fallen onto the magic runes below, which looked shockingly familiar.

“Goodness me... Is this really all there is? Indigo’s going to be upset.”

The devils ignored the masked woman and set about sweeping up the gold dust.

“Is that...the golden medicine? I never knew it was made from the remains of the mutants...”

It would’ve been more fitting to say it was squeezed out, rather than “made.” It was like they’d squeezed out a wet cloth for every last drop of water inside...

Yakumo leaned a little closer to get a better look, but the rusted window frame she was resting against suddenly popped out and fell inward.

“Eek!” Yakumo let out a quiet gasp and tried to reach for it in time, but there was little she could do. The metal frame fell against the factory floor with a loud bang, drawing all eyes toward it.

With the window and frame completely gone, Yakumo was standing there...fully visible. She knew in her heart that she looked like a total moron.

“...Oh my? An intruder? Who are you?”

“I-I won’t give you my name!” Yakumo bashfully blurted out.

“Won’t give me your name, eh? That’s fine by me, little lady. It’ll be erased from this world soon enough, anyway,” the masked woman said with a giggle before giving her cyborg devils the order to attack.

Yakumo, who was still outside the building, spun on her heels and ran for it. The devils clambered out of the window in hot pursuit.

“Huh?!”

After running a short distance from the factory, Yakumo stopped in her tracks. There was another group of cyborg devils just in front of her.

“Skreeeh!”

The creatures hissed and lashed their mechanical claws out toward Yakumo, attempting to cut her to ribbons.

“Hmph!” Yakumo harrumphed as she pulled out her trusty phrasium blade and cleaved through one of the devils in her path.

The creature’s torso was separated from its lower body, and it fell to the ground. Blue blood spilled from the open wound, dyeing the ground beneath it. Yakumo didn’t bother looking, however. Instead, she pressed the offensive against her assailants. The crystal sword she wielded had been created and blessed by her father, giving it an unparalleled sharpness. Only a phrasium blade of equal or higher magical density could hope to outmatch it. Not even these mechanically enhanced devils could do anything to stop her attack. However...

“Hngh?!” Yakumo just barely blocked in time to prevent the heavy orange mace from crushing her bones.

“Ooh? How strange. My Halloween didn’t shatter your sword. What a sturdy sword you have there...”

“I could say the same of the weapons you and your friends have.”

The masked woman had caught up to her, and she’d already begun a relentless assault with her own trusty weapon.

“Friends? Who?”

“The person with the round helmet and the blue hatchet.”

“Oh, Indigo? You fought him too, did you? Then let’s have a little bout!”

The masked woman brought her mace swinging down again. Her speed was immense, but not so overwhelming that Yakumo couldn't make it out. The girl brought up her weapon to block.

"Gwah!" Yakumo shrieked as her arm felt a pang of pain. This blow had been far heavier than the previous one...and she couldn't even tell if it was the extent of the masked woman's power.

"Hm-hm-hmmm? What's wrong?"

"Hngh... Gah!"

The mace came down over and over again, each blow heavier than the last. It was painful...and extremely strange. It called to mind the image Yakumo had just seen, of the statue being pulverized over and over again until it was nothing but golden dust.

On the next strike, Yakumo rolled to the side. The mace struck against the ground, leaving a deep dent in the earth below.

"That mace... Either you can freely adjust its weight...or each time you swing it, it gets heavier."

"Oh my, you figured out my little trick? Just who are you, girl?" the masked woman asked, sounding curious all of a sudden as she pointed her orange mace at Yakumo.

Yakumo had quickly realized the way the mace worked because it wasn't too dissimilar to how one of her sisters fought. Though honestly, Linne's attacks were considerably heavier in comparison.

The fight against the woman had given the cyborg devils time to surround them both. If it was just the devils, Yakumo would have been fine...but she knew she had no chance against them and the strange woman at the same time. Thus, she took the one path to survival that came to mind.

"[Gate]."

Yakumo opened up a portal beneath her that was just big enough for one person to slip through. It was annoying, but it was still a good strategy nonetheless. She locked eyes with the masked woman seconds before she fell through, sensing her glare.

On the other side of the portal, the professor was minding his own business. Or at least he was...before Yakumo suddenly materialized in the air and fell to the ground by his side.

“Whaaagh! Wh-What was that, lass?! You scared the wits out of me!”

The poor professor jumped and backed up against a nearby wall. He nearly tripped over a piece of nearby rubble, but fortunately, one of his soldat attendants had caught him.

“They’ve found us. We need to go!”

“R-Right! Got it!”

The professor immediately grasped the situation and nodded along. Yakumo hadn’t teleported too far from where she was before, so she knew the devils would surround them before long.

“Skreeeh!”

Just as she was figuring out where to escape to, the devils appeared once more. They flapped their leathery wings and picked up speed in the distance. The masked woman was behind them, charging full pelt toward Yakumo and the professor.

It bothered Yakumo that she had to flee, but she saw no point in pushing too deep into enemy territory. If it was just her, she’d have considered fighting, but she had the professor to worry about. Her father often said that the smartest thing to do in a tight situation was to beat a hasty retreat. It was one of thirty-six military strategies. Yakumo didn’t know the other thirty-five, though.

“**[Gate]!**”

She quickly opened up another portal and made the professor and his soldier entourage run through.

One of the devil cyborgs fired its arm forward on a chain, as if attempting to prevent her escape. Yakumo simply sliced the chain apart with her blade, however. It was a meager threat in her eyes.

The last thing Yakumo saw before backstepping through her portal was the sight of the masked woman lunging toward her with that orange mace. Seconds later, the portal disappeared. The woman's attack swung into thin air and landed on the cobblestone paving below, shattering it to pieces.

"...She got away. What a shame. I wonder if this'll annoy Indigo?" the masked woman, Tangerine, mumbled to herself as she let out a deep sigh.

The other side of the **[Gate]** was a back alley in a bustling city. The alley led into the main plaza, where the city's majestic clock tower stood. Off in the distance, one could see the castle on the hill. It was a castle Yakumo knew all too well...the one she was born in.

The sight of the castle left Yakumo heaving a quiet sigh.

"Home at last..." Yakumo muttered. She had unconsciously thought of the safest place to escape to, which was her home. She'd brought them to Brunhild. The specific alleyway they'd come out in was one she and her sisters had used to sneak out of the castle a few times in their childhood.

"This is Brunhild, is it not? You and the ruler here know each other, yes? Quite a wise hideout."

"I definitely know the ruler here, yes..."

The professor seemed happy, and he couldn't quite understand the mixed look on her face.

Yakumo had accomplished her goal of finding more intel on the wicked devout, and her parents would surely be able to make use of that information, yet despite that, she couldn't help but feel hesitant in approaching them after all this time.

Her stomach growled, though she knew not if it was out of anxiety or hunger.

"Oh, are you hungry? That inn over there seems to serve food. Shall we go there?"

"Sure, why not... Ah! Wait, no. Not that inn. I think we should head in the opposite direction instead. Yes, let's go to a restaurant over in this direction. Come on, follow me," Yakumo hurriedly said as she dragged the professor off somewhere else.

The inn he had pointed out was none other than the Silver Moon. It was a state-operated inn run by the Brunhild royal family. Knights working for Brunhild often ate there, and it was generally considered one of the best and safest places to eat in the whole town. Yet for Yakumo, it was one of the most dangerous. All kinds of people related to her father could've been there, after all. In the worst-case scenario, her father could be summoned there after she was recognized...or even her mother...

Yakumo had no intention of leaving Brunhild, but she still wanted a little more time to wrap her head around seeing her parents.

Unfortunately for her, she was far too flustered to realize she'd already been caught. A group of cats sitting outside the Silver Moon was staring right at her, yowling to each other all the while. One started to tail Yakumo, while the others headed back to inform their boss about what they'd seen.

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Meanwhile, on the magic train...

The magic train had stopped at Pariston Station, the first station within Refreese's territory. For geographical reasons, that was our only stop in Refreese other than Bern, the capital city. In other words, we were almost at the end of the line. Our little day out would soon end, and the train seemed to be in good shape. Things had gone shockingly smoothly.

I felt that they'd build from this track and start spreading it out across different regions of Belfast and Refreese, like a local line in another world or something. The track would also eventually be expanded to other countries like Regulus, Mismede, and even Panaches, which would definitely help in terms of trade. And once that was done, there'd be more people who took the train just for vacations too. I had a feeling tour companies and things like that weren't far off.

Yumina wistfully gazed out of the window, seemingly sad the trip was already coming to an end.

"It only took five hours to get to Bern from Alephis... Given how many days it used to take by carriage, this feels surreal..."

"Well, it's not cheap. But since it guarantees your safety, I think it'll offer a lot of advantages to those who can pay."

Taking the magic train guaranteed your safety. No bandits or monsters would be able to attack you during your trip. And assuming freight trains were eventually added, they'd be a safer alternative for hauling cargo. It felt as though a distribution revolution was upon us as a result of my work.

《My liege.》

"Hm? Kohaku?"

I suddenly received a telepathic message from Kohaku, who was back at the castle. I wondered if something had gone wrong.

“Did something happen?”

《You could say that, yes. One of the cats we have on surveillance in the castle town reported seeing a girl who resembles Lady Yae...》

“What?!”

My sudden outburst roused the attention of everyone else in the train cart. Yumina looked at me as if to ask what had happened.

“Wh-What is it, Touya?”

“Well... I just received a message from Kohaku. Yakumo might be in Brunhild...”

“What?! Do you think she is, do you?!” Yae exclaimed as she scrambled over toward me. Everyone else had stopped chatting, so the entire carriage was silent.

“Kohaku, where is she now?”

《I don’t know her exact whereabouts, but she isn’t headed for the castle. We have cats tailing her, so I’m heading after them now...》

Not heading for the castle? Is she thinking of running away again?

I could feel Yae’s impatient gaze bearing down on me.

“W-We must seize her at once, we must! If she is not caught quickly, then she will escape, she will!”

Don’t treat her like a criminal... She’s your daughter, remember? Our daughter!

Yae had a point, though. Yakumo could use **[Gate]**, which meant she could escape easily if not tracked down fast.

“All right. I’ll use **[Gate]** to go to Kohaku. Then, I can meet up with the cats and—”

“W-W-W-Wait a moment, Duke Touya! Emperor Refreese is waiting for us in Bern! It would be improper not to greet him!” Duke Ortlinde suddenly spoke up in a flustered panic.

Oh, yeah... This isn't just a fun little trip, it's part of my duties as a royal. Dammit! Why now, of all times?! If it was just the emperor, then it'd be fine, but his advisers and retainers are gonna be there too. It'd be bad if I vanished midtrip and didn't say hello.

“Wh-Why not just send Yae back to Brunhild by herself? It won't be as big of a problem if just one of us isn't present... Would that be okay, Duke Ortlinde?” Linze timidly asked, raising her voice.

The duke tapped his chin before replying, “Well, so long as Touya's present... If you explain to the dignitaries that you sent one of your wives home due to sickness...it should be quite fine.”

“Very well, then! I am not feeling well, I am not! I ask that you send me home at once!” Yae shouted, speaking so clearly that it was hard to buy the idea that she was sick. Luckily, nobody in the carriage really cared.

Grr... Wish I could go with you, but I'm stuck here... Damn, this blows.

“I'll go with her, father. I want to see my sister,” Frei chimed in, offering to accompany Yae, perhaps out of a sense of responsibility as the second-oldest. If Frei went with her, I'd definitely feel a bit better. That way, at least Yae wouldn't be alone.

“Got it. Now, Yae, please keep a level head when you see her.”

“I will keep my head as level as can be, I will. Calm and collected, I am.”

Yae was just about bouncing off the walls as she spoke, so I wasn't exactly convinced...but I desperately hoped all would be well. I opened up the **[Gate]** to Kohaku, and Yae practically sprinted through. Interestingly enough, Frei also bolted right after her.

“I wonder if they’ll be okay...” I mumbled as I shrugged my shoulders, a mild sense of unease setting in as the train carried on toward Bern.

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Yakumo said her goodbyes to the professor and walked around Brunhild’s castle town. The professor had gone toward the castle to meet an acquaintance of his, likely Elluka...while Yakumo had elected to look around a little.

Ordinarily, they would’ve gone together, but the girl was still hesitant to return.

“I’ll be in trouble, I’m sure... I should have asked mother for permission before going off on my own...” Yakumo whispered to herself. She then let out a sigh as she aimlessly wandered the streets. Even though this was a town in the past, it was a town she’d wandered around from a young age, so she couldn’t possibly get lost in it.

As Yakumo fell into deep thought, a shadow suddenly eclipsed her body. And when she looked up to investigate, she saw a familiar face. It was a younger face than the one she knew, but it was unmistakably her mother’s. Yae stood before her.

“I have found you at last, I have! My runaway daughter!”

“N-No, I... Mother, I did not run away...”

Yae’s glare inspired fear in Yakumo, who instinctively stepped back. She’d already lost to the fearful, silent pressure. Yakumo was a gold-ranked adventurer. She was a proud warrior who had absolute confidence in her skills. And yet, she knew she couldn’t hold a candle to her mother.

“So you’ve just been wandering around, you have? Where, exactly?”

“W-Well, mother...I... I have my reasons, I do... But...”

Yakumo sounded like a frog staring into the gaping maw of a ravenous snake. Her mother's wrath was something she knew well, so she cowered miserably.

The thought of escaping via **[Gate]** crossed her mind, but she dared not pour oil on the fire. And so, she closed her eyes, resigning herself to her fate, when...she felt the warmth of an embrace wrap around her body.

"E-Er...Mother?"

"You foolish girl! Did you not know how worried I was?!"

It was only natural for Yae to fear for her young daughter's safety, gold-rank adventurer or not. While she had no memories of caring for her daughter, who'd yet to be born, Yae instinctively loved and cared for her...and such feelings naturally came with anxieties as well.

"We finally get to meet, we do..."

"Mother, I... I am sorry..."



“Hu hu hu... Looks like Yakumo’s acting all shy.”

“What?! F-Frei?!”

Yakumo’s younger sister, Frei, appeared from behind Yae. Kohaku, one of her father’s summoned beasts, was there as well.

Yakumo naturally grew flustered as she realized this tender moment had spectators. Though she struggled to free herself from Yae’s grip, her mother refused to let go.

“M-Mother, you need to free me!”

“...You worried us all, you did... Did you think I would let you go so easily, did you?”

“Huh?”

Yae’s tone of voice suddenly shifted, prompting Yakumo’s eyes to glaze over. The arms wrapped around her grew uncomfortably tight.

“Ah... M-Mother? Isn’t that a bit tight? Owowowow!”

“Might I have to punish you for your misbehavior, might I?”

Hearing the whispered threat caused the blood to drain from Yakumo’s face. It was the tone of voice that really killed her, as it was something she’d heard many times before.

The same thing happened whenever she failed to return home in time for curfew, or when she told a lie to cover up her own blunders, or when she annoyed the residents of the castle with her selfish desires.

No matter what she did wrong, the punishment was always the same...

“Nooo! M-Mother! P-Please forgive me! Please!” Yakumo screeched as she began to flail in her mother’s grasp. However, Yae’s arms refused to give even an inch.

“F-Frei! Save me!” Yakumo cast all of her remaining pride aside to beseech her sister for aid.

Unfortunately for her, Frei simply flashed her an impish smile and said, “Sorry, Yakumo... It’s bad to run out on your family, isn’t it?”

“HEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEELP!”

“Let us return to the castle, let us. I have some spanking to mete out, I do...”

“Eep! Father! Save meee!” Yakumo called out to her father...but he was nowhere to be found. For a brief moment, Kohaku considered telling Touya about this via telepathy...but Yae’s terrifying smile soon stopped her. Not even Kohaku was immune to the fear.

Yae hauled Yakumo up over her shoulder and began the long trek back to the castle. The poor girl could only lament the fate awaiting her as her mother held her firmly in place...

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“Hrghrghrrrgh...”

“Welcome back, everyone.”

“Oh, yeah...”

I’d kept my anxieties in check long enough to finish the relevant meetings in Refreese before opening up a [Gate] and bringing us all back to Brunhild. Once we got back to the castle, we were greeted by the sight of a smiling Yae and a girl who was probably Yakumo face down on the couch. Frei was applying an ice pack to her butt.

Apparently, the poor girl had been punished with a particularly fierce bout of spanking. In that moment, I made a mental note to never upset Yae ever again.

“What happened here...?”

“I have punished our runaway a little bit, I have.”

Upon hearing that, Yakumo glanced over at me as if to say, “It wasn’t a little bit...” However, Yae didn’t seem to acknowledge her. Though my wife was smiling, I couldn’t help but fear her demonic eyes.

“Yakumo.”

“Y-Yes?!” Yakumo replied, scrambling upward and trying her best to sit comfortably upon hearing Yae speak. Her butt was clearly still sore, however.

“I-I’m sorry for causing you all such trouble, I really am...” she said as she sat up straight and bowed her head apologetically.

You didn’t cause me any trouble! It’s okay!

I walked over to Yakumo and cast some restorative magic on her. The pain seemed to dissipate within a few minutes.

“You okay now?”

“Ahhh... I am thankful, I...er... Thank you, father.”

Yakumo’s cheeks flushed a faint red as she thanked me before turning away in embarrassment. She was rather similar to her mother in that regard. She seemed utterly serious, perhaps even a little too serious, to the point that she lacked flexibility in her focus.

Whatever the case, I was just glad she was okay. That made seven children under my care, which meant there were only two left. I couldn’t help but wonder where my only son and my youngest daughter were...



Chapter II: The Hidden Elven Refuge

“Hmm... Guess it’s still not good enough.”

I floated above the castle with **[Fly]** and amplified my **[Search]** spell with my divinity, but I still couldn’t search the entire world. That was because **[Search]** worked by stretching out my magic power and resonating it with the magic already present in the atmosphere, allowing me to look anywhere that wasn’t protected by magical wards or other such preventative measures.

However, since I was utilizing my divine power to use **[Search]** this time, I had to spread out my own divinity to create the required surface area. But as it stood, I didn’t have enough divinity to cover the entire world. As my divinity increased, I’d eventually be able to do it...but I couldn’t just yet.

Yakumo had told me that the wicked devout were spreading some kind of drug that either destroyed or mutated people, and that they were probably planning something big. Plus, to make matters worse, the drug was apparently formed from the remains of the mutants I’d fought.

I thought I’d eliminated all of the mutants during the clean-up after the final fight with the wicked god, but apparently, I’d missed some... Or perhaps some had just been hidden from me. It was possible to use wards to hide from my detection abilities, after all. That was why I’d decided to use **[Search]** to try to track these wicked devout people down, but it hadn’t worked. I couldn’t even locate the Ark they’d stolen from us, let alone the people themselves. Part of me wondered if it was being kept in the space between worlds, like where the Phrase hid during my battle against them. It was annoying that they were sneaking around the world in this way. I wished they’d just attack me head-on. They probably knew I’d crush them if they did that, though.

As I was pondering the matter, I looked down and saw a ferocious clash taking place. Yakumo was wielding a wooden sword in the training field. Her foe was none other than her mother, Yae. It was a mother-daughter showdown, just like when Frei fought Hilde. Linze had also fought Linne, come to think of it... Both Lu and Arcia had fought as well...in the kitchen, anyway. I wondered if mothers competing against their daughters was just a normal thing in our family.

“Kokonoe Secret Style: Lightning Flash!”

“Kokonoe Secret Style: Dragonfang Disaster!”

Their weapons swung at intense speeds. Even though they were using wooden training swords, I’d reinforced them enough to withstand the monstrous strength that members of my family possessed.

...Why do those swords look sharper than usual? Just how many times have these two fought?

I apprehensively headed down to the training field. There was quite a crowd gathered around it to watch the clash. Not just knights, but maids and civil staff as well. And among them, I recognized a familiar face.

“Oh, Jutaro? You’re here?”

“Ah, Touya-dono... Er, no. Grand Duke Brunhild. A pleasure to see you.”

The stern-eyed man who was so attentively watching the clash was none other than Jutaro, Yae’s brother and Yakumo’s uncle. He was staying in Brunhild as a guest of our castle to be specially trained in the art of combat. His fiancée, Ayane, was here as well, of course. Sometimes he’d train with the knights, but at other times he had personal training sessions with Moroha.

I'd already told Yae's parents and Jutaro about Yakumo. They were surprised at first, but ended up accepting the news faster than I'd expected.

"What do you think of them?"

"What do I think? Well...it's quite hard to put into words. It feels as though Yae has overtaken me, and even her daughter has as well... It makes me question my own strength," Jutaro answered, his shoulders drooping slightly. Honestly, I felt he was being a bit too hard on himself. He was already a very strong man. After training with Moroha, he became even more skilled, so there wasn't a single knight in my order that could beat him in a sparring session. I didn't think it'd be an exaggeration to say he was among the best warriors in all of Eashen. That said, he'd probably never be able to reach the inhuman peaks Yae and Hilde had reached, so I could understand his feelings.

"Kokonoe Secret Style: Prodigal Wind!"

"Kokonoe Secret Style: Flying Swallow Rend!"

Their swords clashed once more. Yae attacked from below, sending Yakumo's sword flying into the air and completely disarming the girl.

"Match over! Yae wins!" Moroha, who was playing the part of a referee, called the end of it. Shortly thereafter, the crowd erupted into applause.

"Hmm... You seem to be well-trained, you do."

"Ugh... I can't believe I'm no match for you even when you're younger..."

"I know the feeling, sis..." Frei muttered, understanding of Yakumo's plight.

Your mothers are already at the level of servile gods, especially with those wedding rings they have on. It's not reasonable to expect

to be able to defeat them, kids! Hell, the fact that you guys can even face them head-on is something to be proud of, I think.

“My turn next. Are you ready, Yakumo?”

“O-Oh, yes. D-Don’t go too hard...”

Hilde, her own wooden sword in hand, stood up to face Yakumo. The fight between the girl and Yae must have really riled her up. She looked raring to go.

Hmm... After the fight with Hilde, she has to face the true boss character, Moroha. Sorry, Yakumo... Your dad can’t get you out of this one.

At the very least, I’d be able to use **[Refresh]** on her afterward. No doubt she’d definitely need it.

Do your best, kid... I’m rooting for you!

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“Ugh... I’m so tired...” Yakumo wailed. She was exhausted after the fight, so it was a small mercy to have the opportunity to plop down in the Parent Café. The group she was with was large enough that they had to push two tables together. In total, there were eight of them, and they were all sisters aside from Allis.

Yakumo, who was the eldest and usually maintained a dignified presence, was showing them a very undignified side of herself.

Quun seemed to find this especially amusing, so she teased her by saying, “Looks like you’re quite popular, dear sister.”

“I never asked for this...”

After Yakumo’s fight with Moroha had ended, she’d been approached by so many knights who wanted to duel her that she ended up fighting the entire order at once in a big, flashy final bout.

“Consider it punishment for your wanton traveling, hm? Maybe you’ll learn something.”

“I’ve learned plenty already...” Yakumo grumbled, biting back at Arcia’s snide comment. She’d already been lectured enough by her mother.

“Hey, hey! Yakumo! Did you fight those wicked devout people?!”

“Yeah! Did you win?!”

Allis and Linne suddenly switched the topic to something more pressing.

Yakumo smiled softly as she brought a glass of water to her lips. She then set it down and sighed quietly before replying, “I fought two of them. A man in a strange helmet with a blue hatchet and a woman in an iron mask with an orange mace. The one in the helmet escaped during my fight with him, and I escaped from the woman in the mask during my fight with her.”

“You escaped?”

“I had a companion with me, so I had no other choice. Otherwise, I would have made a stand. He called himself the professor, had a lot of Golems, and—”

“Th-The professor?! Y-Y-Yakumo?! You met the professor of all people?!” Quun practically leaped out of her chair, raising enough of a ruckus to turn the heads of some nearby diners.

“Hm? Didn’t you know? I thought he went to see Elluka...”

“He did?! I-I have to go!” Quun exclaimed, then immediately dashed out of the door and left the café.

Yoshino shook her head, apparently disappointed that one of their sisters was so eager to flee their lunch.

“We haven’t even gotten our orders yet...”

“That’s fine. I’ll eat Quun’s share,” Frei responded quickly, grinning wide due to her good fortune. Apparently, she had no issue with her sister ditching them.

“...So, what can you tell us about the wicked devout?”

With Quun’s outburst over, Yoshino veered their conversation back on topic.

“I didn’t really fight either of them properly, but I think any of us are strong enough to defeat them. Our mothers would destroy them. They seem to possess unique powers, however. The masked woman had an ability not unlike yours, Linne.”

“Like mine?” Linne asked, raising an eyebrow in confusion.

“She had something similar to **[Gravity]** imbued in her weapon. Maybe the helmeted man’s ability to teleport things is his own specialty as well. Their hatchet and mace were suspicious enough on their own, actually. I could sense a strong portion of the wicked god’s power inside them.”

“Oh, that reminds me. The wicked devout member that stole the Ark had a strange red rapier as well...” Yakumo’s words reminded Arcia of that little detail. She hadn’t got a chance to see it clearly, but it was enough of a similarity to point out.

“Then they could be some manner of sacred treasures imbued with divinity? Wicked treasures, perhaps?” Frei mumbled to herself as the waitress finally showed up with a serving tray full of desserts.

“Sorry for the wait there, kids! Here’s your fruit parfait and your Mont Blanc.”

“Yay!”

The fruit parfait was placed down in front of Linne, while Arcia took the Mont Blanc. Then, the waitress began serving the rest. Frei had a

mille-feuille, along with a tasty-looking roll cake. The roll cake had been Quun's order, but it wasn't hers anymore.

"I'm just glad we've all made it here without an issue so far."

"You might've made it back easily enough thanks to your teleporting, Yoshino...but Elna and I lost our phones in a river the moment we showed up..."

Yoshino casually chomped at her shortcake as she spoke, much to Linne's chagrin. Yakumo and Yoshino could warp across long distances, Quun happened to materialize not far from Brunhild, and Arcia was able to make use of Distortion Blau to arrive faster. The others, however, each had a rougher time as far as actually making it home went.

Frei had ended up materializing on the faraway island of Helgaia, but she'd managed to use her phone to make contact pretty easily.

"Hmm... Kuon and Steph still aren't here, are they? Do you think they might've run into some trouble? Lost their phones like we did, maybe?" Elna mused quietly as she poked at her strawberry tart. Kuon was a pragmatic boy, so there had to be some reason why he hadn't simply called right away.

Frei laughed quietly as she started to polish off her cake, then replied, "He usually has a level head, but our Kuon might be out of his depth this time."

"No way! He's got a really level head! That's what I love about him!"

"Hah. There you go again with your Kuonmania, Allis..." Linne mumbled, shaking her head in disbelief. Kuon and Allis had been just about inseparable since they were babies, probably because they were around the same age. Nobody knew exactly when Allis had started to develop her crush on Kuon, not even the sisters at the table. However, one could probably consider it a natural result. After all, Kuon was the only boy Allis's age who was capable of matching

pace with her. And as far as the sisters knew, Kuon cared about her as well...though he wasn't nearly as open about his feelings as she was about hers.

"You really like Kuon, don't you?"

"Of course! He's strong, and cool, and gentle!" Allis replied, smiling innocently in the face of Elna's question. Her upfront manner was enough to make the sisters chuckle nervously, but it was the kind of thing that would make poor Ende grind his teeth in worry if he'd heard it.

Kuon and Allis were both on great terms with the other's parents, so the only one who was a stick-in-the-mud about it was Ende. Really, the two could've been engaged to be married then and there, but Touya had a firm policy of allowing betrothals only when the kids came of age, and on the kids' own terms, so it hadn't reached that point on an official level yet.

Of course, that line of thinking wasn't solely for the sake of his children. Touya had very much not wanted his children to have politically motivated fiancés at a young age, so it was more for his own sanity than anything else. That was why none of Touya's children were engaged, even though they were all royal princesses.

There were various individuals from other nations who had made formal inquiries for possible betrothal arrangements, but Touya had denied them all outright. None of the sisters really had any particular interest in relationships yet, so all of them were fine with it.

That digression aside, the girls were still pondering the fates of the remaining two siblings.

"Do you think Kuon and Steph both lost their phones, then?"

"I could definitely imagine Steph doing it... She lost her phone more than a few times back in our time, didn't she?" Arcia said, letting out a sigh as she took a sip of her tea. Their youngest sister, Stephania,

was at best naive and at worst catastrophically dense. Whenever she had an idea, she'd usually just charge in without thinking at all.

Arcia reasoned that Steph had no reason to fear anything because of how ironclad her defenses were thanks to her **[Prison]** ability. There was nothing that could harm her when she activated it, after all. Any little girl who perceived herself as physically invincible would end up charging headlong into trouble all the time, unfortunately.

Linne turned to Arcia, who seemed to have the best understanding of Steph's character, and asked, "Who do you think will show up next, then? Steph or Kuon?"

"If Steph's further away, then it'll have to be Kuon. He'll definitely have started heading straight for us, but..."

"He usually has a level head, but our Kuon might be out of his depth this time," Frei repeated herself as if to end Arcia's sentence.

Nobody disagreed with that assessment. Sure, Kuon was a certified genius, but he was also a bit inexperienced in the ways of the world. Thus, he regularly found himself getting into trouble without meaning to, much like his father.

"I hope he hasn't run into trouble..." Yoshino mumbled to herself, hoping for the best. Everyone at the table prayed for the same thing.

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"This is trouble..." Kuon mumbled. He found himself stranded on a country road on the way to Gallaria, the capital city of the Regulus Empire.

There was a mountain of corpses strewn all around him. Goblins, hobgoblins, goblin archers, goblin mages, goblin soldiers, goblin rangers, goblin generals, goblin lords, and even a goblin king...had all fallen due to his might.

Why had so many goblins been there to begin with? That was a rather poorly timed stampede. The carriage Kuon had been riding in ended up getting caught up in said stampede.

The goblins chased after them at full speed, and in the confusion of it all...someone had pushed Kuon off the carriage. The boy had been completely stunned. He'd felt the hand on his back, and then he was on the ground as the carriage sped away.

The man who'd done it was someone who'd been annoying Kuon the entire trip. He'd been complaining and grumbling for the majority of the ride. He'd clearly pushed Kuon off the cart in a panic, to stall the pursuing goblins.

The idea was probably to offer up a sacrifice, and the easiest target would've been the child who was traveling on his own. The man was the kind of coward who'd consistently pick on the person he viewed as weakest.

Kuon had only a few moments to get his bearings straight as he fell to the ground, but he quickly hopped to his feet and cast one of his father's signature spells.

“[Slip]!”

“Gwaaakgh?!” a goblin bellowed in confusion before tumbling head over heels. Kuon rushed in, grabbed the rusted sword that the goblin dropped, and promptly killed it before turning to face the others.

“Graaakh!” a goblin soldier roared as it swung its weapon toward Kuon.

“Whoops!”

Luckily, the boy promptly ducked, his eye glowing an orange-gold hue all the while. That was the power of precognition. It was one of Kuon's seven mystic eyes; namely, the one that allowed him to predict his enemy's movements. It worked similarly to his mother's

ability of foresight, but it only activated in very short bursts. That still made it an effective tool for avoiding enemy attacks, however.

Kuon set about dodging attacks, stealing weapons, and using said weapons to slaughter the incoming goblin horde. After ten minutes or so, he was the only one left standing.

When Kuon was thrown off the carriage, he'd lost the bow and arrow that he'd brought with him. Fortunately, he had everything else he owned in the backpack he was wearing. Thus, the only question that remained was how to proceed.

"Should I walk from here?" Kuon muttered, pondering the matter.

He waited there for about two hours, but there were no signs of his original carriage or any new ones. He had little choice but to set out on his own. He just had to hope that the man who'd shoved him off the cart would be charged by the relevant authorities at the end of his trip.

"They probably think I'm dead..."

There was a town that wasn't too far away, but in light of the stampede, it would've either been evacuated or fortified, so there was no point investigating.

The boy heaved a small sigh and took out a map from his pocket. He'd bought the simple cloth map from a store before he'd gotten on the carriage. Kuon's father, Touya, had mapped out several regions using his phone. He'd then sold the cartographic information to various nations, creating even more intricate maps for public consumption. They weren't cheap, but they were useful in times like this, especially since he'd lost his smartphone.

"Hmm... I departed from Betan, and we would've passed through Lybub soon...so if I cut through this forest here, I should reach Gallaria shortly. At worst, I'll arrive at a town closer to it."

Kuon looked at his map, then looked at the dense woodland to his left. It would be faster for him to cut through the woods than to follow the road. The map showed a pretty dense area, but the boy didn't mind a challenge. Sure, there could've been monsters or beasts in there, but those wouldn't pose much of a threat to him.

Kuon began to search through the pile of dead goblins for a suitable weapon. The one wielded by the goblin king appeared cleanest, but it was far too big for Kuon to wield effectively.

"This one should do..." he mumbled as he picked up a knife that had been wielded by one of the goblin soldiers. It had likely been looted from an adventurer fairly recently, since it wasn't as worn or chipped as most of the other weapons the horde had wielded.

Kuon would've preferred to have a scabbard, but goblins weren't civilized enough for such things, so instead, he pulled a cloth out from his backpack and wrapped it around the knife. Then, he slipped it into his coat pocket for ease of access.

"Maybe I'll find a beast that can give me a ride..."

One of Kuon's mystic eyes held the power of subordination, a force that could compel animals and monsters alike to serve him. Unfortunately, it had specific working conditions and wasn't always reliable, so it was basically down to luck.

"Let's get going. No point just standing around," he muttered to himself for a bit of inspiration, then headed toward the dense woodland in front of him.

The forest was so overgrown it almost felt like the place was attempting to actively deny entry to all outsiders. Most people who came upon these woods would've found them off-putting. There was some kind of silent pressure emanating from the trees.

Danger. Run away. This forest is dangerous. Flee. Danger. Leave. Fear. Fear. Fear.

Any normal person would've heeded the building anxiety induced by the silent waves, but Kuon simply moved forward without a care in the world.

It wasn't that Kuon couldn't sense it. If anything, the pounding intimidation was nipping right at him. He just didn't have time to spare.

"This is some kind of magical ward...and a powerful one too. Does that mean there's something special in this forest?"

Kuon used the knife he'd looted from the goblin to cut away at the branches and shrubbery as he passed on through. He couldn't help but find the place stranger as he moved deeper. It felt as though something was nearby, watching him, but he couldn't tell if that was just an effect of the intimidating ward.

After a while, a dense fog rolled through and it became harder to see. Kuon could barely even make out his hands in front of him at that point, which he found odd, as fog typically formed when the temperature was low and there was high humidity. That was typically why fog rolled in after the rain, after all. And yet, the forest was neither cold nor humid... He'd also felt a pulse of magic power nearby.

Upon adding all those factors up, it became clear that this fog was likely man-made, probably by the same people who'd placed the ward around the forest. If this was an attempt to get Kuon lost or remove him from the forest, then...

"Stop right there," a voice rang out from the fog, bringing Kuon's motions to a halt. It was a hoarse voice that seemed like it belonged to an old man. Kuon's instinct about being watched was seemingly correct, and now this person was using the fog to obfuscate himself.

"Young one. Turn back at once, lest you incur the curse of calamity... Leave this place..."

“No, I’m good, thanks. I just want to get through the forest as quickly as I can. Do you want an offering or something? I can pay.”

“Wh-What?” the hoarse old voice replied in confusion, wavering slightly. Clearly, whoever was speaking had expected Kuon to react fearfully...not like this.

“We need not your money, child. Leave this place at once unless you wish for monsters to gnaw at your bones.”

“Look, I don’t really care what you say here. I need to get through this forest to reach the other side. I’m not going to turn around, okay? I mean you no harm, so just let me pass.”

“No! Turn back!”

“Not happening.”

“No fair! Come on!”

Kuon started to move again, and the voice grew a little more strained. The boy picked up on the sounds of rustling leaves above him. It seemed whoever was speaking to him was hiding up in the trees.

“...What are you doing?! Get him to turn back!”

“Ugh, I guess I’ve got no choice here... We’ll scare him a bit more, don’t worry.”

“Hm?”

Kuon’s ears picked up on two hushed voices this time. The sound of a young man and a young woman. The hoarse voice was most likely an act they’d been putting on. And so, he decided to keep his ears open as he continued to move through the woods.

Suddenly, a shadow appeared before him. It was a hulking creature that was about four meters tall. Its body was made of wood, but it

had a generally humanoid shape. With every step it took, bark flitted from its form.

It was a Wood Golem...and a juvenile one, at that. Fully grown ones were six meters tall at the very least. Still, it was massive compared to the six-year-old boy it stomped toward.

“Graaargh!”

Kuon cast a silent glare toward the creature. Whoever had been speaking to him clearly interpreted that as a sign of fear, and they spoke once more with reclaimed confidence.

“Begone, intruder! Lest the Golem of the Woods strike you dow—”

A loud crash rang out as the Wood Golem’s tiny head cracked open and fell to the ground, severed from its broad shoulders. At the same time, a deep roar rumbled out from its body. It fell backward and shattered into pieces in an instant.

Kuon heard two horrified gasps resound from above.

“Huh. So Golems don’t count as living creatures, eh?” Kuon’s eye glowed a reddish gold as he muttered quietly. It was one of Kuon’s seven mystic eyes, bearing the power of compression. It was an eye that could compress matter just by staring. There were some limits, however. He couldn’t crush objects that were too sturdy, he couldn’t use it on living creatures, and it had to be things he could clearly see. The eye worked on things like Skeletons and Zombies, so Kuon thought to use it to target the core in the Wood Golem’s throat. Much to his surprise, it actually worked.

“What is this kid?!”

“He’s not normal!”

The voices had grown so flustered that they weren’t even hushed anymore.

Kuon had heard the words “not normal” several times in his youth. All of his siblings had heard those words, really. He was used to being seen as something not quite human. It wasn’t exactly the nicest feeling, but that didn’t mean he’d shy away from his powers. His powers were part of who he was; they were precious gifts from his parents.

Kuon walked past the Wood Golem’s remains and headed deeper into the forest.

“A-Aaah! Wait! Wait!”

“Oh no! Get him to stop!”

A rustling sound rang out into the woodland as the man and woman finally jumped down from the trees in front of Kuon.

They both had long ears, and they wore green clothing. The latter was likely for camouflage in the forest, but the former...

“Oh, you’re elves.”

“You can’t go further! Please, turn back!” the male elf yelled at him. He’d already drawn a bow, aiming an arrow steadily at Kuon.

The female elf had a magical staff pointed at the boy in a similar fashion.

“As I told you, I just want to pass through. Can’t you just look the other way?”

“Enough! We’ve warned you several times!” the male elf barked as he let loose one of his arrows, and his companion conjured up a sphere of water about the size of a man’s head.

Kuon promptly used his knife to bat away the arrow, and he simply stared down the water sphere as his eye glowed blue-gold. The sphere evaporated into nothingness right before it hit him. Both elves were stunned by that turn of events.

“What?!”

“How?!”

“Magic doesn’t work on me. Well, it’s not exactly that. I can just cancel its effects using my mystic eye of negation.”

There were some limits to this particular power, in that he had to be able to see the entire range of the magical effect. That was why he couldn’t use it to cancel out the fog, since he couldn’t see all of it. It was a similar limitation to his compression eye, but he could at least activate that one from a distance.

“Huh?! What?!” the mage woman sputtered as she tried to conjure another sphere, but it fizzled away the second it formed at the tip of her staff.

“Wh-What are you?!”

“I’m Mochizuki Kuon. Kuon is my given name. Can I pass through now?”

“That’s enough, all three of you,” a new voice suddenly called out, interrupting Kuon’s introduction.

Three elves appeared from the underbrush. One of them wore a grass-green robe, and it was clear from his adornments that he was different from the others.

“Elder!”

Despite his title, the man looked no older than any of the other elves around him. He appeared to be in his mid-twenties at the oldest, and his long golden locks had not the faintest hint of gray.

“Human boy, we’ve inconvenienced your passage. For that, I would apologize and invite you to our elven refuge. You can rest there, wash up, and be on your way.”

“An elven refuge? I appreciate the gesture, but I’m kind of in a hurry...”

“Sunset comes soon, boy. Try to wander through the woodland in the dark and you’ll be lost all through the night. Stay the night with us, then leave when the light returns.”

Kuon looked upward and saw traces of the dusk sky peeking through the branches above. He was on his own, and camping in the woods didn’t sound all that much fun. He’d probably have to sleep up in a tree branch just to avoid the wild animals. He didn’t have much food, so he started to consider his options, but there was something he had to verify first.

For just a moment, Kuon’s eye flashed a stunning platinum. He’d triggered a special ability that allowed him to determine a person’s intentions and feelings. It was the very same power his mother held. He sensed no malice in the elves, only an abundant sense of wariness. There were also traces of fear within, though he couldn’t tell if that was related to his presence or the presence of something else...

“I’ll stay with you tonight, then. Sorry for the trouble, Mochizuki Kuon at your service.”

“Mmm... I am Wolfram, chieftain of the elven village in these parts. I can’t offer you much in the way of luxuries, but I can at least provide a warm bed and a hot meal. Colette, show him through.”

“Me?! R-Right... This way, please...”

The elven mage who’d tried to cast a water sphere at him earlier let out a small yelp before composing herself and guiding Kuon away. As she and the boy wandered off into the depths of the forest nearby, the elf with the bow and arrow spoke up against his elder.

“What are you thinking, sir?! We can’t let such a dangerous child into our sanctuary!”

“There’s something about him. He’s powerful for his age. Very, very powerful... He may be able to aid us.”

The chief had quietly observed Kuon dispatch the Wood Golem. He’d quietly watched as the boy had rendered the two other elves powerless. After seeing all that, he wondered if the boy’s mystic eyes were the reason for such strength. He wondered if that strength was enough for what he required.

The chief quietly headed back to the village, clinging to a quiet hope that salvation may have finally arrived.

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The elven refuge existed in harmony with nature. There was a single large oak tree in the middle of the village, and various suspension bridges jutted out from its canopy, leading to other buildings in the upper branches of the surrounding trees. The entire village was suspended off the ground.

There were a few lights scattered here and there, illuminating the dark. Upon closer inspection, Kuon found that they were actually fireflies in little glass bottles. They weren’t ordinary fireflies, though. They were flashflies, a type of magical firefly that absorbed ambient mana and discharged it in the form of powerful light. In short, they were animals that could naturally cast the **[Light Orb]** spell from within their bodies.

Kuon realized that the reason they were being used as a light source was because it would be unwise to use torches, as bringing an open flame out near the branches and leaves of the trees was a dangerous move.

The hut he’d been taken to belonged to Colette’s father, the village chief. To Kuon’s eye, they had looked like siblings, but that was elven immortality for you. Long-lived species barely experienced physical change once they finished maturing. Two of Kuon’s mothers, Leen

and Sakura, had already finished maturing by the time Kuon was born. All of his mothers were blessed with various forms of divinity, however, so their aging processes would be abnormal no matter what.

Kuon was shown to his room, then was asked to come and eat. Chief Wolfram, along with his wife, Ursula, and his daughter, Colette, sat at the table.

“My apologies. I can’t offer you more than this.”

“No, it’s fine, really. If anything, I’m incredibly thankful.”

Kuon took a look at the food spread out on the table. There was bread, a leafy salad with beans in it, and a soup with boiled veggies and roasted meat inside.

A common stereotype about elves was that they were vegetarian, but that wasn’t true across the board. The meat was fairly simple, just some manner of lightly salted poultry, but Kuon found himself enjoying it quite a bit.

As Kuon ate his meal, which was far heartier than he had initially assumed, Chief Wolfram spoke up, asking, “Now then, Kuon, where are you off to?”

“Brunhild. I’m headed there to see my family. I was planning to stop by Gallaria first, but I lost my way and decided to cut through the forest instead.”

Gallaria, the capital... You’re not wrong in that it’s faster to cut through the woodland, but we had wards in place designed specifically to prevent trespassing...”

“You did, but they wouldn’t work on me.”

Wolfram couldn’t help but find himself baffled by Kuon’s casual response. He couldn’t understand how the boy had so easily bypassed the warding left to Wolfram’s people, the last magical

remnant of a mighty ancient civilization. His wife and daughter could barely believe it either.

“You’re quite remarkable for a human, young Kuon...”

“Oh, well... My family’s far more remarkable than I am, I think. We spent a lot of time training together.”

To be more specific, Kuon had trained with the goddess of the sword, the goddess of the hunt, and the god of combat. His mothers and sisters were insanely skilled people as well.

Wolfram was hesitant for a moment, but he finally mustered up the courage to speak to the strangely imposing boy.

“I have a favor to ask of you, young Kuon...”

“What kind?” Kuon poked at some veggies with his fork as he casually replied. He’d been expecting something like this.

“This forest is also known as Deity’s Grove. My people guard this place.”

“Huh? Guard? So you’ve got something sealed up here?”

“Aye, we do. This forest contains a vile Artificer, a great monster from an age long past. It’s said to have wreaked havoc during the era of a great magical kingdom, destroying all in its path.”

Artificers were monsters that were created by human hands, the product of magical research. They were also known as artifact creatures. They ranged from simple to catastrophic, and it was even believed that Slimes were originally created by people as well.

Golems, Gargoyles, Chimeras, Mimics, and Homunculi all counted as Artificers. And apparently, one such creature was sealed within this forest.

“The beast’s fetters are all but torn apart, and its miasma is already leaking out into the surrounding area...”

“Oh, I see. That explains how weird things felt earlier.”

The ward in the forest was designed to instill unease, but the presence Kuon had felt was far more intense than a simple spell.

“So, what kind of creature is it, exactly?”

“I can show you, if you’d like to see it with your own eyes.”

Kuon was a little surprised to hear that. Usually, sealed beings were locked away deep in the earth, or someplace out of reach.

When they finished their meal, Chief Wolfram and his daughter left the house with Kuon.

Wolfram held a flashfly lamp in his hand, illuminating the dark path in front of them. The seal was apparently right on their doorstep, on the biggest tree in the center of the village. It only took a few minutes for Kuon to see what all the fuss was about.

“The tree itself is the seal, keeping it held back. But as you can see, it’s weakening.”

“What is this thing?” Kuon asked as he looked up at what could only be described as a sword wrapped in vines that held it against the tree.

It was a broad weapon with a silver-white sheen. Its hilt had beautiful golden lines etched into it, and an ominous red jewel slotted in the middle. It was definitely a sword...but did a sword count as an Artificer?

Kuon tilted his head slightly, staring the blade down. And eventually, he heard a voice.

“Kill... Kill... Slaughter... Break... Ruin... Kill... Kill... Cut... Slice... Slash... Hack... Gouge... Slaughter...”

“Whoa, scary,” Kuon said as he took an uneasy step back. There was murderous intent emanating from the blade... It almost felt like it was alive.



“The Mindsword. It’s a cursed weapon with an evil will. This Artificer was created by an ancient civilization some five thousand years ago. Our protective tree keeps it sealed, but eventually it’ll break free and wreak havoc upon us all once again...”

“I don’t know about eventually... It looks ready now.”

Right as Kuon said that, the sword began to shake against the vines holding it in place. The wood crumbled away, allowing the blade to slice off even more of its restraints.

“N-No! It can’t be!”

“KILLLLLLL!”

The demonic sword broke free of its fetters completely to float in the air in front of Kuon... It then turned its tip toward him.

“SLAUGHTER!”

It sailed through the air like a loosed arrow, desperate to impale the child on its blade. Just when it looked as if Kuon was about to be skewered, the blade stopped in midair and fell to the ground with a clatter.

“C-CANNOT BE! STUCK?!”

“So you move around with magic, huh? Too bad, I negated it.”

Kuon’s eye was glowing blue-gold. His mystic eye was canceling out the magic. Even if Kuon couldn’t see the spell, he could comprehend it and see the area it was affecting. Thus, he could cancel it.

The Artificer rested helplessly on the ground, its means of motion taken away entirely.

“Man...you’re a pretty bad sword, aren’t you?”

“WRETCH! ME... REND YOU!”

“Wow. You’re one rude sword. Hey...that gem on your hilt... That’s your core, right? Will you stay alive if it gets destroyed? How about we find out?”

Kuon’s left eye shone with a red-gold light, triggering his compression ability. Kuon’s mystic eyes could be triggered from either one of his eyes, and he could even use them in tandem like this.

Kuon’s left gaze settled on the red gemstone embedded in the sword’s hilt. It began to make a creaking noise.

“S-S-STOP! STOP! ENOUGH! TOO MUCH!”

“Hm? What was that? Enough? You think you’re in a position to command me?”

The gem started to make an unpleasant grinding sound.

“GYAAAGH! W-WAIT, PLEASE. ME. BEG OF YOU.”

The blade grew more desperate as time went on. The core was the source of an Artificer’s life. Much like the Wood Golem Kuon had killed earlier, this blade would die if it lost its core.

Usually, an Artificer’s core had some kind of protection around it. This sword, for example, had a regenerative ward placed on it that made it harder to destroy. However, Kuon’s mystic eye had already negated that as well.

Both Colette and her father watched in disbelief as Kuon relentlessly bullied the sword with the threat of impending death. Their people had given their lives to protect the seal. They’d all been prepared to unite and give their lives to reseal it, should the day come...and yet, a six-year-old boy was giving their existential threat a psychic noogie.

“Er... Kuon?”

“Oh, sorry about this. I just need to teach this thing some manners, okay?”

“Er, right...”

Kuon kept threatening the sword by holding its life in his hands, and the sword kept begging for forgiveness. Then, when things started to die down...the sword immediately flew back up into the air and tried to kill Kuon once more. It didn't take long for the mystic eye to trigger again, and for the Mindsword to be back on the floor, screaming for mercy all the while.

“I'm sorry, kid! I won't disobey you anymore!”

“Oh, now you can speak properly? That's funny. What about your broken speaking pattern earlier?”

Creak... Creak...

“GYAAAGH! PLEASE STOP! I'LL DIE! IF YOU DO IT ANYMORE I'M REALLY GONNA DIE! PLEASE!”

The sword's screams echoed through the elven refuge. At some point along the line, the gem turned from red to pale blue, as if to mirror the blade's horror. Kuon had subdued the blade, so now it was his to command.

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“I got carried away... I didn't mean to cause your people such unease over the years, really. Please find it in your hearts to forgive me...” the cursed blade said as it awkwardly bowed its hilt in apology.

The elven villagers were so stunned by the sight that they found it hard to even respond. After all, the wicked creature they'd dedicated their lives to sealing away was now groveling at their feet. They were somewhat happy and somewhat just plain confused.

“He seems sorry to me, so if you could let this slide...” Kuon said, then bowed his head, prompting the flustered Chief Wolfram to dismissively wave his hand.

“E-Er, it’s fine... None of us came to any direct harm or anything, so...”

“Thanks for that, I appreciate it. So, uh, what should I do with this sword, anyway? Destroy it?”

“Forgive me, kid! Please! How about I join you, yeah?! I’d be a good companion!” the sword begged as it pressed its pommel up against Kuon’s leg, desperately clinging to him for mercy.

Kuon grimaced slightly at the thought of it accompanying him.

“You placated it, so we’d be happy to leave the decision to you, young Kuon. The stain upon it seems to be gone.”

The “stain” the chief referred to was a common feature of Artificers and artifacts. In short, Artificers gradually absorbed negative emotions over time, and they could influence those around them with what would then manifest as a curse.

Kuon’s father had once encountered a stained artifact back in Eashen when he fought Yamamoto Kansuke. The man had a crystal artifact in his eye that was deeply stained in negative feelings.

The stain manifested in different ways. Sometimes as a result of the artifact’s purpose, as was the case in Eashen, and sometimes as a result of the object being used to slaughter many, as was the case with this blade.

Cursed objects often also possessed incredible power, however...

“I guess I am in need of a weapon, but...”

“That’s right, that’s right! Toss away that dirty goblin dagger, boy! Take me with you!”

Kuon didn’t really like the idea of wielding a talking blade. He knew his sister Frei would’ve loved the prospect, but he wasn’t so easily impressed. He wondered why the sword talked so weird too. Also, why it was being so submissive. Was it just trying to humor him, or

was that actually how it was? He knew that the Babylon gynoids all had their own weird speech quirks, so it didn't throw him off too much. It was still annoying, however.

Kuon had a sneaking suspicion that the sword might've been one of Doctor Babylon's creations, so he turned to face the sword and asked, "Who was your creator?"

"Hmh? Some cheap bastard named Chrom Ranchesse. Hated that guy."

Kuon's eyes widened upon hearing that. Chrom Ranchesse... He was the legendary Golem meister who had created the crowns and transcended the barrier between worlds around five thousand years ago.

Kuon had heard a lot about Chrom Ranchesse from Doctor Babylon and Quun, because his mother Yumina was the interim master of Albus, the white crown. Though honestly, he'd never expected to hear that name here of all places.

"...If I wield you, will there be a price I have to pay in compensation?"

"No, sir! That Chrom jackass was trying to make new Crowns. Ones that didn't cost anything. I'm a prototype."

In other words, Golem technology was at play in this sword. There were types of Golems on the western continent that were more like equipment than actual autonomous machines, so the cursed sword here likely fell into that category.

"C'mon, boy. Pick me up. Take me with. You'll never go back to any other sword after feeling me."

"You're being too pushy about it..." Kuon sighed and picked up the blade by the hilt. He gave it a few brief swings. It wasn't too heavy, nor was it too light. If anything, the blade was perfectly suited to him. There was one issue, though.

“You’re a little too large for me.”

“Really? Give me a second, then.”

A literal second passed before the cursed blade shrank. It had been a broadsword before, but now it was more of a shortsword. It was the ideal size for Kuon.

“You can change your size like that?”

“Sure can. To an extent, at least. I can even do this!”

The sword suddenly expanded to the size of a greatsword with a huge, broad blade. Kuon’s father had a spell called **[Modeling]** that allowed him to alter shapes like this, so the blade must’ve worked off a similar principle.

Kuon thought quite highly of the blade’s capabilities, but he didn’t say it out loud. After all, he didn’t want the sword getting full of itself or anything.

“I have a ton of other features...but you can find those out later!”

If this magic blade was truly one of Chrom Ranchesse’s creations, then it doubtlessly had some fascinating history and abilities yet unknown. It had piqued Kuon’s personality, at the very least. And so, he decided then and there that he’d bring it home to have Elluka and Doctor Babylon look it over.

“Oh, young Kuon. We can’t possibly let you go without at least preparing a scabbard for the blade,” Chief Wolfram interjected, as Kuon swung the sword around a few more times. He had a point. Waving a sword like that around unsheathed would just invite trouble.

“Wowzers. Thanks a ton, sir. I don’t want grime getting on my blade, you know?”

“Does that matter to you?”

“Think about it, boy! The blade is a sword’s face! Would you want mud on your face?! That’d make you a big disgrace!”

Kuon understood the words, but he couldn’t help but notice that the blade was positively filthy from years of exposure to wind and rain while strapped to the side of a big tree. The boy decided not to mention that, however.

“Thank you so much for freeing us from our duty, young Kuon. We’ll prepare a banquet at once. Please join us.”

“I appreciate that offer, really, but I only had dinner a little while ago, so I’d prefer to decline if possible. I’m a bit tired too...”

Though night had fallen, it wasn’t even ten o’clock yet. Wolfram couldn’t help but smile, remembering that the little boy in front of him was just that, a little boy.

Kuon headed off to bed, while the elves prepared to feast and celebrate. Just to be on the safe side, they wrapped the tree branches back around the sword for the rest of the night. The elves feared the blade may try to escape or attack while Kuon slumbered, but the blade denied any thoughts of doing so.

“If I try anything funny, he’ll really destroy me. I believe it, fully. That little devil would smile while doing it too. Believe me. I saw it in his eyes. There’s wickedness there. I’m not gonna disobey him, no way...”

The elves couldn’t help but almost pity the blade as it trembled and shivered. If it could perspire, it would surely have been sweating bullets.

“Here, we made you lunch. You can eat it on your way.”

“Wow! Thank you so much.”

The next morning, Kuon had walked toward the edge of the village with his cursed blade in tow. Much to his surprise, however, Colette had followed after him with a gift.

The cursed blade jutted out of Kuon's backpack, nestled safely within a black sheath that the elves had fashioned from local materials. Kuon wasn't wearing him at his waist, though, since that felt a bit uncomfortable.

"I hope you come back to see us again. We'll treat you to the banquet we owe you when that day comes."

"I'll be sure to. Thanks," Kuon replied as he waved back to the village elves, who were standing in the distance to see him off. According to the information he'd been given, he just needed to walk straight through the forest to reach the road to Gallaria.

"Where we off to, anyway?"

"A smaller country, Brunhild. I'm gonna see my family, but, uh...don't talk to me while we're on the road like this, okay? People will think I'm weird."

Any onlookers would have seen Kuon talking to himself and gotten confused by the sight. Kuon was just as concerned as any other person would be about general public perception.

"Humans sure have strange manners."

"If you ask me, it's swords that have strange manners. By the way, do you have a name? Did Chrom Ranchesse give you one?" Kuon asked something he'd been wondering about for quite some time.

"Infinite Silver, if I remember right."

"Infini...what? That's too long. Let's just call you Silver."

"Huh? Fair enough, I guess. Oh, kid. We're nearly out of the woods."

Silver's words prompted Kuon to look up ahead of him. And sure enough, the forest parted and revealed a sloped hill with a nearby road down from it.

"Hmm... Let's see... Sun's over there, so Gallaria's gotta be over that way."

Kuon found his bearings, hefted his backpack, and began making his way down the hill. He had a bit of a spring in his step, perhaps because he was finally free of the woods. If he could get to Gallaria, he'd be able to find a carriage straight to Brunhild. He was excited to finally see his family again, but he also knew he'd have to do a little bit of shopping. After all, his sisters would be mad if he didn't bring them back some souvenirs.

It wasn't easy being a little brother to so many demanding sisters. Thankfully, Gallaria was the heart of Regulus. There was no better place for shopping. And in the absolute worst-case scenario, he'd be able to hand off Silver to either Frei or Quun. They'd like that as a gift, surely.

"Hmh?! Didja just think something bad about me?!"

"You're imagining things," Kuon said, shushing the worried blade as he began a brisk walk along the road to the capital.

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"Let's celebrate the four of you with a toast! Cheers!"

"Cheers!"

I raised my glass...and everyone followed after me. The tavern was completely packed with adventurers, so the hustle and bustle was louder than ever.

"Congrats! Have a good one!"

"Treat yer wives well, kid!"

“C’mon, lads! Drink more! We’re celebratin’!”

At the center of this raucous torment was the man of the hour, Ende. Today was the day he’d gotten married to Melle, along with Lycee and Ney as well. The after-party was being held at the adventurer’s guild tavern in Brunhild. Allis and my children had attended the ceremony, but they’d been sent home to bed once night fell. This party had a ton of rowdy adventurers attending, after all. It’d be bad for them to see all that. Yumina and Linze had offered to look after the kids, so they were even babysitting Allis in the castle too.

We’d reserved the tavern for our celebration, and most of the attendees were adventurer friends of Ende or women that Melle, Ney, and Lycee had befriended in Brunhild.

“More fried food and cake coming through! Clear the table!” Micah, manager of the Silver Moon, said as she came out from the kitchen with a selection of food on hand. All the attendees cheered at the sight.

Micah, Aer, and Lu were staffing the kitchen. They’d been producing food nonstop all night. This was largely due to Melle’s massive appetite. She just kept asking for more.

When Micah set the large platter down on the table, several hands reached out to grab at the tasty treats set upon it. Melle and the other not-so-blushing brides were more than eager to dig in as well.

“Oh, how delicious! We were right to ask Touya about this!”

“Lady Melle, try this cake. I’ve never had it before!”

“Ah, delicious... Yummy. Ohhh, this is the best.”

The brides smiled wholeheartedly as they shoveled food down their gullets. They were really going all-out... Poor Ende was still being harassed by adventurers over on the other side of the room, but the brides didn’t seem to be paying him much heed.

Technically, Ende was only Melle's groom. He'd married her, while Ney and Lycee had married Melle.

Gay marriage was very uncommon in this world. It wasn't forbidden, it just wasn't seen as a regular thing to do. Though really, it could've just as easily been something that was underreported. There was no formal marriage registry in this world. If you were a noble, you'd have to report it to whoever you served under, but that was about it.

Well, Brunhild definitely has no plans to discriminate against same-sex marriage, so they'll be free to live happily as...wife and wife? Partners, I guess.

Unfortunately for Ende, the casual observer saw this kind of arrangement as Ende getting himself some kind of harem, so he was the target of no small amount of envy.

Ende managed to shrug off his jeering assailants and staggered over toward me.

"Good job out there, Ende."

"Hngh... Adventurers have no sense of restraint, do they? They're the worst sometimes..."

"You're an adventurer too, you know?"

He was a gold-rank, at that. He was cleared to take on national-level threats and be paid for the trouble. And I was that rank too, of course.

"Well, congrats on the wedding either way. Look after your wife, yeah? And good luck when the girls start pushing you around."

"Yeah, I'll take that to heart. I know you've been there, after all."

With that, Ende and I clinked our glasses together.

"It's not like getting married is gonna change our dynamics much, anyway..."

“By the way, are you gonna move or stay put?”

Ende currently lived in a regular house in Brunhild, but it wasn't too uncommon for newlyweds to move to a new place entirely to mark a new chapter of their lives.

“We're having a new house built. It'll get more cramped when we have the baby down the line, so I'd like to raise her in a big house with a garden.”

Damn, having one built? I guess you can afford it, with your rank and your ability to warp around... You're probably swimming in dough, huh? Well, that's fine by me. Give all that hard-earned money to Brunhild's carpenters and stonemasons, pal!

Apparently, Ende's new home was to be in the new residential district we were planning. There were plans to build a train station there, so it'd probably end up being a busy place.

Right as I was about to ask more, he got dragged off by a few more guests.

Sheesh, someone's popular today... Oh well, no harm in letting him be the main character for a little while.

Ende had really gotten used to life in this world. If anything, he had more friends than I did. He was extremely well-liked among his fellow adventurers, I knew that for sure.

According to Allis, Ende would eventually take over as Brunhild's guildmaster. And looking at him and the way he interacted with the guys around him, I could see it. He was the right man for the job.

“Your Highness.”

“Oh, Relisha. Nice to see you.”

Just before I got fully absorbed in thought, the current guildmaster snapped me back to reality. I wasn't surprised to see her here. Ende was one of the guild's prized adventurers, and this guild tavern was

technically her property as well. And since I was so busy with doing Grand Duke stuff, most of the gold-rank quests ended up getting assigned to Ende. Thus, he'd done a lot more for Relisha and the guild than I had.

Relisha was still wearing the dress she'd worn to the wedding ceremony, and she looked stunning. She had natural beauty as an elf, but the dress really accentuated all of her best features. Fortunately for her, nobody at the reception had thought to try and charm their way into her good graces over it.

"About that drug..." Relisha spoke in a quiet voice. She clearly had some new information about the mysterious drug the wicked devout had been spreading. Or at least, I hoped she had some new information.

"There are very few cases of any adventurers on the eastern continent having even heard of it. I'm not entirely sure if that's by design or not..."

"It's a supposed cure for the goldflower pox, right? That's how they've been selling it, anyway. Barely anyone on this side of the world would care about it, since we're so far from Isengard."

The goldflower pox, as it had come to be known, was a peculiar disease said to have originated in Isengard, though it was actually manufactured by the wicked god to convert humans into its mutated thralls.

Unfortunately, rumors had already spread out that the goldflower pox was the reason for Isengard's complete collapse, so many on the western continent sought out the medicine that could supposedly ward it away. I just couldn't understand the purpose behind spreading something like that around, however.

I had Flora run an analysis on the powder Yakumo had brought back, and we determined that the drug was infused with a powerful curse.

It was a curse that ate away at the body and mind of a person until they became a shambling invalid. The effect wasn't too dissimilar to that of the purple crown, Fanatic Viola, in that it gradually sapped at a person's sanity over time.

It was far too elaborate a plan just to kill people. They must've had something else in mind...but what?

"I've sent word to the adventurer's guilds across the eastern continent. I'll let you know the moment I hear about any major cases."

"I appreciate it."

"It's my pleasure, really. You're a gold-rank after all."

Relisha simply smiled after saying all that. Since the adventurer's guild concept hadn't yet caught on over on the western continent, I decided I'd have Silhouette and her Black Cats investigate.

"Still, there've been plenty of strange things going on lately. We've seen multiple stampedes, much more than usual, and there are even reports of villages going silent."

"Silent?"

"Indeed. I hear a fishing hamlet in northern Refreese is just a vacant ghost town now. Traveling merchants headed up there on their usual route, only to find the place completely barren. No person to be found...and nothing but strange footprints leading towards the water..."

Relisha's words caught me off-guard.

A fishing hamlet in northern Refreese?

The island Yoshino had taken me to, the one attacked by the Fishmen, would've been in the same waters as that hamlet. We'd defeated the Fishmen there, but what if they'd attacked other places previously? What if those villagers had mutated, become more

Fishmen, and wandered into the waves? Was their base really under the water after all? The Ark functioned as a submarine, so that did make some amount of sense.

I had ordered Sango and Kokuyou to have their aquatic familiars scour the depths, but nothing had turned up quite yet. They hadn't been able to explore everywhere, though, as some places were just too full of sea monsters to scout...

"Maybe I should look into designing an unmanned submarine..."

An underwater search drone seemed like a good idea. Or maybe some kind of underwater Frame Gear. Plus, I needed to consider how to access the Ark when I found it. For that, I'd probably need to talk to Elluka or Doc Babylon. Or the professor, since he was still here.

I gulped down the last of the fruity water in my glass as heavy thoughts ran through my mind.

Interlude: Magical Sugar

“I made Sacher torte today!”

“Oooh!”

The delicious chocolate cake Lu brought in elicited excited gasps not just from the kids, but from all of my wives as well. And honestly, the sight of the dessert, which had its origins in Vienna and was known as the king of chocolate cakes, also got me excited.

When we were on our honeymoon, Lu had picked up just about every cookbook she found along the way, and she’d spent every single day making something new from the recipes inside.

As far as desserts went, she regularly collaborated with Aer, owner of Parent, and the two of them had managed to produce many cakes and treats comparable to those you might find back on Earth. Though, some of the recipes included ingredients you couldn’t find in this world, so they didn’t always come out quite right.

I placed a forkful of Sacher torte into my mouth, only for the rich chocolatey flavor to spread out across my tongue. It was so rich and creamy... I could barely believe it! I wasn’t a huge fan of desserts overall, though, so it only took one slice for me to lose interest.

It was one of the richest cakes I’d ever eaten, in all honesty. It seemed the king of chocolate cakes was just a touch too heavy for my blood.

“It’s a little bitter, but it’s so yummy!”

“Delicious! Mama Lu, more! More!”

Linne and Frei happily chowed down on the cake. I personally thought it might’ve been a bit too rich for the kids, but they’d all taken to it.

Lu had made enough Sacher torte for the whole family, including Karen and the other gods. She'd honestly made way too much, if you asked me.

Karen and the others were enjoying it too, though. They'd barely said a word since they'd started eating. Vienna was known far and wide as a city of music, and it was perhaps that thought that made Sousuke's music sound so much sweeter in the moment.

Is this by Schubert? Schubert was from Vienna, I think...

Frei had already begun tucking into her second slice, eating as if her life depended on it. I didn't see why she went so quickly, in all honesty. There was plenty to go around, and there'd definitely be leftovers after everyone had their fill. Then again, with Yae around, it was hard to say for sure...

Though funnily enough, Yae hadn't even touched a second slice yet. I wondered if she was feeling unwell.

"Mother, is your stomach okay?"

Yakumo seemed to be wondering the same thing I was. Normally, Yae would've eaten an entire cake herself, but for some reason, she'd set her cake down just midway into her first slice. Anyone would think something was amiss.

Yae's expression seemed a little mixed, but eventually, she spoke up, saying, "My stomach is fine, it is... However, I am concerned about my waistline, I am... That is why I feel I should restrain myself here, I do..."

Yae's words caused a few of my wives to freeze, forks still in their hands.

That explains it.

Sacher torte was made with a lot of chocolate, cream, and butter. That made it especially calorically dense. Thus, Yae was worried

about her weight. She probably felt that eating a full cake here and then having dinner later would be far too many calories for a single day.

“I-I’ll stop here too, I think.”

“Yeah, same...”

Linze and Elze carefully placed their forks down on their plates. Sue and Sakura also seemed hesitant to touch a second serving, and by the end, none of my wives ate anything else.

The kids didn’t seem to care, though. They kept on eating. Well, with the exception of Yakumo and Quun. They were probably old enough to start feeling self-conscious about their food intake. Frei didn’t seem to care at all, though. She just kept shoveling cake into her mouth.

“Are you guys full? Don’t you like the cake?” Linne asked, tilting her head in confusion at the sight of the frozen women.

Linze awkwardly spoke up in response, saying, “Um, well...if you eat too much, you’ll get fat, so...that’s why we’re not having any more of it today.”

“But I eat lots and I don’t get fat...”

“Er, well...” Linze was at a loss for words before her puzzled daughter.

I just looked to the side and quietly chomped on a little bit more cake.

I remembered the recent incident in which they all misunderstood me and thought I was saying they were fat (which, dear reader, was something that happened in the 2nd *In Another World With My Smartphone* Drama CD. Said CD has not been licensed or translated at the time of writing)... I’d learned my lesson that day. Men didn’t have any reason to comment on women’s bodies.

If the deer doesn't step on a branch, then the hunter's less likely to shoot it...

"I wish there was a cake you could eat that didn't make you fat..."

"It's just about impossible to make a nice cake without sugar and fattening ingredients, though..."

I overheard Elze and Lu talking. It wasn't impossible, as far as I knew. Back on Earth, there were sugar-free cakes, and there were even special cheesecakes that were low in calories. The reason people tended to gain weight was because they took in more calories than they expended, so that solved the problem.

I could hardly blame them for having such thoughts. People often had another stomach for dessert...so it was hard to resist their draw.

"A cake that won't make you fat, eh...? Sugarshell might do the trick," Karina suddenly said from across the table, casually plopping more cake into her mouth right after.

Lu suddenly perked up, turning her head toward Karina. Arcia also looked over with curious eyes.

"What's Sugarshell, exactly?"

"A Sugarshell is a shelled creature found deep under the waves in certain regions. The pearls found within their bodies are lumps of pure sugar, known as sugarpearls, but it's said that they don't have any of the fattening qualities of actual sugar."

"So you can cook food with it that won't make people fat?!"

A clattering sound rang out as all my wives clambered to their feet, some knocking down their chairs. I already knew what was about to happen.

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"I knew it..."

We'd gone out in search of Sugarshells after I'd used my magic to track down one of their habitats. We were on the coast of the inland sea between Sandora, Ryle, and Lestia. Quite a large number of them lived near the small islands in the area, it seemed.

"How will we defeat the Sugarshells living here, father?" Arcia asked as she walked along the beach by my side.

"Well, we can use Sango and Kokuyou's powers to walk under the water without any issue. It'll take some getting used to, though. Won't be as easy to move about as it is on land."

"You needn't worry about that. We'll keep you safe."

"That'sss right, darling. We wouldn't ssstand to let you down."

Sango and Kokuyou both waddled off with cheerful expressions, confident in their ability to let us walk on the seafloor without drowning.

From the moment they first heard about the Sugarshells, Arcia and Lucia were determined to find them. They couldn't pass up on the chance to hunt down such a unique ingredient. Yae, Yakumo, Elze, Elna, Sakura, and Yoshino also decided to tag along for the hunt as well.

I was initially just going to do it on my own, but after running my **[Search]** spell, I found that there were a ton of them. Plus, while some Sugarshells had sugarpearls inside of them, not all of them were guaranteed to. That was why they were so rare. Though according to Karina, they rarely came up to shore too, so even finding one of the creatures was considered an abnormal event.

In other words, the more hands the better.

Sugarshells were simple creatures, but they could swim around at high speeds. Though it wasn't technically swimming, but more like

jetting. They drew in seawater and expelled it from their bodies at high speeds to propel themselves.

If I came across a group of them, I planned to use **[Gate]** to send them to the shore, where they'd be helpless.

"Ssshall we?" Kokuyou said, then raised his voice, generating a membrane-like barrier around our group. The barrier functioned much like my **[Prison]** spell, letting oxygen flow inside but blocking the actual water.

*Hmm... Wait. The details are a little different, but couldn't I have just done this on my own using **[Prison]** or what? Wait, no...I'd have to cast one around everyone...and it wouldn't be able to move with them, so I guess not...*

I cast **[Light Orb]** and we began our trek to the seafloor.

"It's so strange walking at the bottom..."

"L-Look! Fish! They're so pretty!"

Elze and Elna looked overhead, only for a beautiful school of fish to swim over us. They were moving in a tightly packed spherical formation, sparkling in the scant traces of sunlight that reached down here. If I remembered right, fish swarming in that way were known as bait balls. They packed themselves up to make themselves collectively bigger and prevent themselves from being eaten. I wondered if they were on the run from some bigger fish.



“They look delicious, they do...”

“I bet they’d be tasty when grilled...”

“I think they’d work well deep-fried with soy sauce.”

Yae, Lu, and Arcia all had different, yet similar, thoughts on the sight of the bait ball.

Perhaps the fish had sensed their intent, as they grouped up out of fear of my wives and daughter. The bait ball quickly sped away, clearly not wanting to end up on the menu.

The sight of them made me feel a little hungry for fish too, however. And so, I made a mental note to catch some on the way back.

“How much longer, daddy?” Yoshino asked as she came over to peek at my smartphone.

“Not much further now. There are a few clusters of them in this area...and the closer one’s right around...there.”

My **[Light Orb]** shone in the dark depths, illuminating the sight of a group of Sugarshells. When I’d heard they had pearls, I imagined the stereotypical look of a pearl oyster, but instead, they looked more like large scallops. Insanely large scallops, even. The ones I was looking at had to be over a meter long at minimum. It was like something out of Botticelli’s *The Birth of Venus*.

“They are bigger than I expected, they are. Should we be attacking them?”

“Hmm... Well, Karina said they have high magical resistance, so...”

Sugarshells were creatures known as Artificers, much like Slimes. Basically, that meant they’d been created by human hands a long time ago, but after thousands of years, they’d ended up evolving on their own.

“If magic’s no good, we’ll cut them up,” Yakumo said, then unsheathed her blade. Given that we were underwater, it was even harder to make out Yakumo’s crystal blade. I wondered if that counted as a tactical advantage.

“If magic doesn’t work, won’t Elna be at a disadvantage?”

“It’s okay, mom. I have this. It’ll do the trick,” Elna replied, then smiled as she waved her star wand casually. It could act as a flail and deal physical damage from a distance, so she’d be fine.

Yoshino’s magic aptitude was for Fire and Wind, rendering her fairly useless underwater... Luckily, she still had **[Reflection]**, **[Absorb]**, and **[Teleport]**, all of which offered balanced utility.

Arcia, on the other hand, only had **[Apport]** and **[Search]**.

“It’s okay. I’m not as skilled as Yakumo, but I can still fight with blades,” Arcia said, unsheathing the twin swords at her waist. Much like Yakumo’s, they seemed to be made out of phrasium.

Lu took out her own twin blades. She’d also been trained by Moroha, though not quite as intensely as Hilde and Yae. Either way, she was more than a match for the average adventurer.

I didn’t know how strong Arcia was, but given that Karina and Moroha had apparently trained all of the kids to some extent in the future, I felt it wasn’t worth worrying about her.

“Let us fight them, let us. Elna, could you strike from afar and try to draw some in, could you?”

“Y-Yeah, I can try.”

Yae’s order prompted Elna to wave her wand high.

Shooting bullets from my Brunhild wouldn’t mean much under the sea, but Elna’s star was guided by magic, so it’d probably be fine. Not as effective as it would be on land, though.

“Hiyah!”

The star detached from the end of Elna’s wand, flying at full speed toward a nearby Sugarshell. It smashed right into the creature...but unfortunately, the blow wasn’t nearly strong enough to break the shell.

Various Sugarshells in the area began to float upward in response to the sudden commotion. I counted six in total. They suddenly began rapidly spinning around, whooshing through the water toward us like throwing stars.

“Incoming!”

We all dashed to the sides in order to avoid the Sugarshells and their attacks. Yoshino, Sakura, and Elna ducked further back, while Lu and Arcia stayed in the rear to defend them.

Elze jumped forward to retaliate, screaming, “Crusher!”

Elze’s crystal gauntlets shattered a nearby Sugarshell into tiny pieces. Karina had warned me about how dense and hard to break they’d be, but apparently, that meant nothing to the raw destructive force Elze could unleash.

“Let us go as well, Yakumo!”

“Right!”

Yae and her daughter charged forward with their blades at the ready, destroying a few more of the creatures.

Yakumo flawlessly cleaved through one of them, bisecting it cleanly.

“Sis! Don’t just cut them like that! You’ll damage the pearls!”

“Huh?! R-Right!”

By a stroke of luck, the Sugarshell Yakumo had attacked didn’t have any pearls in it.

Yae also changed up her attack style after hearing that warning, switching to broader horizontal slices. Sugarshells kept their precious pearls in the middle of their bodies, so we wanted to avoid damaging that part in particular.

I stood on the sidelines, watching Elna as her star wand pulverized a nearby Sugarshell. Not wanting to be outdone by my own kids, I switched Brunhild to blade mode and set to work.

I was a little curious about where Sugarshells even came from, but I decided to save that question for another day. Now was a time for hunting...and there was prey all around.

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“It is over, it is,” Yae said, then sheathed her blade, watching over the remains of the fallen Sugarshells.

There were eight of them in total. Lu and Arcia began taking them apart, mumbling to themselves and shaking their heads before moving on to the next.

Sadly, Sugarshell meat was apparently not very good. That was a shame, since they looked like tasty scallops from where I was standing.

“Found one!” Lu cheered, hefting something upward and holding it above her head. It was a white pearl about the size of a small watermelon, the sugarpearl we’d come looking for. It lacked the kind of sheen I associated with normal pearls, though.

“...Shouldn’t that be dissolving, since we’re underwater?”

I kind of pictured the pearls as solid lumps of sugar, so I was naturally concerned.

“Oh, don’t worry. The actual sugar substitute is inside the pearl. There’s an outer layer that protects it, so unless we crack it open, it’ll be fine.”

That made sense. It was like an egg, essentially. The membrane seemed to be kind of thin, though, so I quickly fired up [Storage] and tossed it inside.

All right! Mission accomplished! That was surprisingly easy.

“Lucky us. Should we head back to the castle, then?”

“Hm? What are you saying? One isn’t nearly enough. Come now, onward to the next group of Sugarshells.”

“Huh?”

Everyone except me started to casually walk along the seafloor. I was very confused by the matter.

“We’ve got a lot of kids... One sugarpearl isn’t nearly enough...”

“That’s right! We’ve gotta get enough for tons of snacks!” Yoshino cheered in response to Sakura’s words, but I didn’t really get it. We could just use regular sugar with the treats for the kids, surely.

Sure, it might not be good for them, but it’s not like they care as much about the fattening stuff, right? Like...

“Touya-dono. We have already decided, we have.”

“That’s right, Touya, so come on. Let’s get going.”

Yae and Elze broke me out of my daydream and ushered me forward. I shrugged, as I had no interest in rocking the boat. Sometimes a man had to put up with things to care for his family.

And so, I pulled up the next location on my phone.

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“That’s about it, I think...”

We’d hunted and hunted and hunted. I’d stopped counting after the hundredth kill, but if I had to hazard a guess, we’d probably killed five hundred of the damn things.

If we kept going at this rate, we'd probably make the poor Sugarshells endangered.

"We got about twenty-four pearls in total... That should be enough to last us a while," Lu said, seeming happy with herself for the most part.

Twenty-four pearls after so many kills... Can't tell whether we got lucky or not.

Right when I was about to open up a [Gate] home, Sakura suddenly put her finger to her lips and shushed me.

"...Strange noise nearby."

"Oh?"

I tried to listen, but couldn't hear much.

Sound was fairly easily transmitted in water, but even then, I couldn't make out anything. Sakura, on the other hand, was blessed with enhanced hearing, so she noticed something we couldn't.

I couldn't help but wonder what she'd heard.

"Something's coming...from below!"

I suddenly felt a tremor, then a fissure in the seafloor below us opened up...only for an enormous Sugarshell to emerge in a cloud of sand.

The ones we'd killed were only about one meter long, but this thing was easily four.

"Is this the mother Sugarshell, is it?!"

"No, I think it's more like a variant!"

I didn't know if it was some kind of evolved form, or just some freak of nature, but it obviously wasn't a regular Sugarshell. We'd be able to beat it the way we'd beaten all the others.

“But how can we—?! Agh!”

The giant creature swam circles around us, stirring the water and creating a massive current. We were all thrown off-balance, making it hard to even stand.

Damn it! I can't fight like this! Ugh...! What do I do?!

The giant Sugarshell swooped around, lunging straight for us. Or, more specifically, it lunged straight for Elze.

“Dad! Her shoes! **[Gravity]**, quick!”

“Oh, right! Target lock... Elze's boots! Imbue **[Gravity]** now!”

“Registered.”

Cesca's voice rang out from my phone as the weight magic was applied to Elze from a distance. The sudden shift in weight in her shoes allowed Elze to regain her balance on the seafloor. She stood firm, ready to face the charging Sugarshell head-on.

A stream of light circled Elze's fist, coalescing until it intensified and pulsed around her fingers.

“Combat Arts... Divine Corkscrew!” Elze roared, opening her fist and unleashing the light. It then wrapped around her arm, taking the form of a massive conal drill.

She swung her arm forward, crushing the massive Sugarshell as it charged right into her. The crumbling creature broke into pieces, scattering out across the seafloor.

...Just one hit? Really? M-My wife's getting too strong, I think... Maybe they all are. I should watch my step.

“You did it! Amazing work, mom!”

“Elna! You're amazing! I never would've thought of putting that spell on my boots! That's my girl!”

Elze jumped for joy and wrapped her arms tight around Elna. I felt a little left out... It was my spell that saved her, after all...

“Ah!” Arcia let out a startled squeal before lifting a chunk of dead giant Sugarshell and tossing it aside.

...Wait, was she always that strong...or is it because we're underwater?

Beneath the shell she'd tossed aside was a massive sugarpearl, one that looked to be the size of one of those exercise balls.

“That's huge! What a find!”

Lu charged toward the huge thing. Both mother and daughter giggled as they stood by it.

“We got the perfect pearl right at the end!”

“Mhm! Now we can make tons of treats!”

I caught a glimpse of Yoshino jumping for joy as well, but she wouldn't be so happy when her metabolism caught up with her. Lu and Arcia probably needed to calm down on the treat-making too...

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“Today, I made Sacher torte! But with sugarpearls this time!”

“Oooh!”

“...We only just had Sacher torte the other day, though.”

I was once again faced with the familiar king of chocolate cakes, which left me feeling a bit disappointed that it was more of the same.

My wives and daughters ignored my comment and began cutting themselves slices.

“Mmm! This is delicious, it is! And we can eat as much as we like, we can!”

“Yummy! It tastes the same as the normal version!”

“Ahhh! So rich! So sweet! So decadent! This is bliss!”

Yae, Elze, and Linze were already on to their second helpings.

...You know, even if there's a sugar substitute in there, it won't instantly stop you from gaining weight. There are still eggs, flour, and other stuff in there...

I knew that saying that out loud would be like invoking the wrath of the gods, so I quietly looked down at my Sacher torte slice instead, electing to take a few bites.

Mmm... It's definitely good, but it's too rich. One slice is more than enough for me.

A few days later, my wives decided to go on a diet. They said they felt like they'd been eating too much dessert. Just as I'd always thought. All good things in moderation.



Chapter III: Agartha, the Mechanical City

“As far as underwater Gollems go, the maestro would be the best person to ask. But they’re a misanthropic and totally eccentric sort, so they stopped living in civilized parts a long time back. Can’t think where they are now,” our guest, the professor, mumbled to himself as he stroked his wispy beard.

We weren’t on Babylon itself. Instead, we were in Doc Babylon’s research wing at the far end of the castle. It had been specifically built at the far end because I didn’t want anything exploding and damaging anything important to daily life.

“I could adapt a Frame Gear to work underwater, but it wouldn’t be half as good as something built from the ground up for deep-sea exploration. I think as far as tracking the Ark goes, we’ll probably want the latter.”

After saying all that, Doc Babylon produced a plastic model of one of our Chevalier Frame Gears. It was wearing some kind of backpack with built-in torpedos and anchor attachments.

Hm... Those attachments would definitely help us fight underwater, but she’s right. We should make new drones.

“If we were to design something new, how long would it take?”

“Hm... Might take a while if we work with no basis at all, so we should at least work with a blueprint to start. If you ask me, we should go with an Over Gear instead of a Frame Gear.”

...An Over Gear? Those Frame Gear variants designed to work with the crown Gollems? But why?

“Humanoid forms aren’t the most versatile for swimming. It would be wisest to make it resemble an aquatic animal. And our Over Gear

designs are already based on animals, no?" Elluka replied curtly. She had a point. A streamlined design would be best for maneuvering through the waves.

"We could even attach Frame Gears to it if we go that route. I approve. Would we make it fish-shaped, Doctor?" Quun asked, unable to resist chiming in. She'd been anxiously listening to the entire conversation up until that point.

Doc Babylon clicked her tongue and folded her arms in response before saying, "Hmm... It's a bit uninspired to just go with a fish. Perhaps a turtle design like Sango would be a bit more my style? A Frame Gear could easily ride that too."

"Whatever do you mean? We should obviously go for a shark-shaped design. It needs to look intimidating to keep it from running into any undersea trouble."

"No way, a shark's a bad look. If we're going in that general direction, then it should be a dolphin. Dolphins are far cuter!"

The four mechanically-inclined geniuses began a heated debate about the shape of the new machine. I ended up slinking away, as I was nothing more than a sideline observer. It wasn't like I had anything of value to input, anyway. Though honestly, I did have one question.

"If we're building it as an Over Gear, then what crown will we use as the core?"

Noir had the lion-shaped Leo Noir, Rouge had the tiger-shaped Tiger Rouge, and Blau had the deer-shaped Deer Blau. The question now remained, who would be the pilot and core for the new one?

Elluka looked at me like I'd asked something dumb and replied, "Your Yumina can do it, no? She has the white crown, Albus."

“But Albus and Yumina only have a temporary contract, don’t they? Will she be able to pilot it safely?”

Albus’s ability, Reset, came at the cost of his contractor’s memories. That was why I hadn’t allowed Yumina to make a full contract with the white crown. I didn’t want her putting her very mind at risk, after all.

“Even if she’s a submaster, she can still operate it. The crown ability doesn’t need to trigger to operate the Over Gear, and the main master isn’t around to assume direct control, so there’s no issue.”

That made sense to me. If that was the case, I was comfortable enough leaving the underwater piloting to Yumina.

“I’ll also start cooking up an aquatic Frame Gear prototype. If I make it in the shape of a mermaid, we can repurpose the torso designs from the other models. Then, we can mass-produce them. Better to have them in bulk than keep them as unique ones like your Valkyrie Gears.”

Mass-produced mermaid Frame Gears? That would be pretty handy for accidents at sea, so why not?

“We should also have your Reginleif and the Valkyrie Gears refurbished for underwater operations, since it would be inefficient to have you pilot mass-produced variants. I’ll be sure to send a bill for the development costs, all right?” Doc Babylon said and grinned, rubbing her hands together as her eyes narrowed.

Damn it... I know you need it, but you guys really piss away my money sometimes...

I grumbled quietly...only to snap out of it when Quun tugged on my sleeve.

“Is that a problem, father?” she mumbled, looking up at me with pleading eyes.

Hngh...! I-I have to hold fast! This is a trap! I'm being tricked here! Quun, stop! They're all grinning at me over there!

"...I'll pay. Just try not to overspend, okay?"

"Thank you, father!" Quun exclaimed, then jumped for joy and gave me a big hug. Doc Babylon, Elluka, and the professor smiled wide. They all flashed thumbs-up at me in sequence.

Damn it all... They got me hook, line, and sinker.

"Now then, let's get to work on the concept stage. I'll handle the Over Gear, but who wants to start inroads with the mass-production Frame Gear?"

"Oh, me! Wait for me! I'd love to help!" Quun yelled, then parted from me in less than a second and ran after the engineering trio. It sure was tough being a dad...

My coffers were running low, so I needed to go make money. I'd been leaving most of the gold-rank jobs to Ende, but I figured that had to change sometime. He'd just gotten married, after all. In a way, you could see it as me doing him a favor. Yep, that was it. Just me being an all-around great pal.

That's me. Touya, the regular family man.

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"Touya-dono! If you are going to the adventurer's guild, then we would like to join you, we would."

The next morning, I was about to head off to the guild in search of a job when Yae and Hilde approached me. Apparently, they were right on the cusp of reaching gold-rank status. That would make them the fourth and fifth people in the world to do so. The way things were going, more than half of the gold-ranked adventurers in the world would be my direct family members. Hilde's grandfather was the first

one to ever attain that rank, so he was positively giddy that his offspring was following in his proverbial footsteps.

I felt that the two had probably been motivated by the fact that they knew Yakumo and Frei both had gold status in the future. I was sure that their parental pride made it impossible for them to be a tier below their future kids.

Brunhild didn't really have any requests at the silver or gold level, but that didn't mean you couldn't find any in other places. It was just a matter of looking around. Ende and I could teleport around, so we managed to do work all over the world and raised our ranks fairly quickly. I wondered if my kids had such high ranks thanks to Yakumo and Yoshino's abilities to move long distances in short amounts of time as well.

Ordinary silver-ranked adventurers needed to travel for days on end to reach their target, then actually fulfill their objectives before trekking back to the place they got their mission. People like me had an innate advantage that took out a lot of the busywork, so it was only natural there was only one gold-rank before I showed up. The introduction of the magic train might help speed things up in that regard, though.

Yae and Hilde had probably approached me thinking my spells could get them an easy quest clear. I wasn't about to deny a request from my wives, but they could've easily asked Yakumo.

"It is a touch awkward to ask one's daughter for help with reaching her level, it is..." Yae said before letting out a nervous chuckle. It was just as I'd thought, she had her parental pride on the line. I couldn't blame her, really.

"Didn't Elze want to go for gold too? Should we bring her along?"

Ende had reached gold-rank and he was Elze's sparring partner, so she'd been eager to match him.

Hilde spoke up in response, saying, “Elze is out shopping with Elna today. I believe they’re looking for clothing at Zanak’s shop, so we’d best not interrupt them... I think she’s obsessed with dressing the poor girl.”

Hilde smiled slightly after sharing that information. That definitely made sense to me. All my wives loved their kids, obviously, but Elze and Linze went above and beyond when it came to fussing and fawning. Yakumo, Frei, and Quun were the oldest kids and they all had some air of independence about them. They were still children, obviously, but they’d grown out of going out for activities with their parents. Yoshino and Sakura didn’t really do all that much together beyond music, while Arcia and Lu had more of a friendly mother-daughter rivalry going on.

Elna and Linne were the youngest children we had here, so they were the ones who got fawned over and spoiled the most. Elze was particularly attached to Elna. Elna wasn’t a big fan of fighting, so she didn’t train with her mother, but they spent just about every other waking moment joined at the hip. Elze loved taking Elna out and buying her all kinds of cute outfits. She was one of the proudest mothers I’d ever seen.

“I never thought that Elze would be such a doting mother. She’s the fussiest among us! Elna’s definitely the cutest of the lot, though, so I understand.”

“I would say that you are the second-most doting out of all of us, I would.”

“It’s not my fault Frei’s so cute, is it?”

Frei was definitely cute, that was for sure. I was just glad that my kids were so well behaved.

“If we do not give them proper independence...it will be hard for them to find spouses, it will.”

“Hngh!”

Yae’s words hit me right in the gut. I didn’t want to think about my kids getting married!

I know it’ll happen someday, but... Hm... Maybe I can stop my kids from getting married, somehow? If I just come up with a scheme...

“Come now, let’s get going.”

“Yes. There is not any point fretting over inevitabilities, there is not.”

“Grrrgh...”

Yae and Hilde started marching toward the guild, so I wearily followed them.

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“If you’re after gold or silver quests...how about these? Nobody’s taken any of them yet.”

We were in the adventurer’s guild talking to Relisha. She handed over two slips of paper to Hilde and Yae respectively.

Brunhild’s guild didn’t have any silver or gold postings, but Relisha had access to the global network, so she was able to relay information on foreign jobs.

“Hm, let’s see... A Thunderwyrms has attacked Palouf, it has.”

“And this one tells of a Frost Giant in Elfrau.”



Both of those creatures would have given any average silver-ranked party a run for their money, but I felt like Yae and Hilde could work together to take them down in no time at all. That didn't mean we could afford to be complacent, though. Safety was always paramount.

"You need not worry, you need not. Our sister-in-law has trained us well every day, she has."

Hm... I don't know how to feel about that line. It's almost like she's saying my worrying is pointless. But I guess that's a relief to hear too...

Either way, I sent Luli with Yae and Kougyoku with Hilde just to be safe.

Luli could talk with the Thunderwurm, so Yae could possibly end her quest without conflict. And in Hilde's case, Kougyoku could keep her warm over in Elfrau.

I opened up **[Gate]** and sent the girls to their respective destinations. I told them to have their summoned companions notify me with telepathy when they were done. Then, after I saw the girls off, I turned back to Relisha.

"So, are you after a job?"

"I sure am."

"I'm afraid to say that I have no quests befitting your stature at this time."

"Huh?"

No gold-ranks at all? Nothing? No national crises?

"Ende took care of all the outstanding requests prior to his wedding, since he wanted to take some time off..."

“Goddammit!”

That bastard! I go out of my way to do him a favor...and this is how he preemptively repays me?! No, no... Ende taking care of business before his break is pretty commendable... I can't fault him for it. Damn him. Damn him to hell!

“Are there any high-value quests available? Anything that'd help me make some quick money?”

“I must admit, hearing a world leader almost beg for money is a little concerning, but... Hm, let's see... There have been reports of a stampede around Roadmare,” Relisha replied after flipping through a pile of papers on her desk.

Stampedes were bad news. If left to its own devices, the horde of monsters would end up endangering innocent people. It was definitely something that had to be dealt with immediately. However, there were other things to consider.

“Is this the kind of situation Roadmare's adventurers could handle on their own?”

“It is.”

“Tsk... I can't take it, then.”

I could have easily gone over there and solved it in the blink of an eye, but then I'd be depriving the honest adventurers of Roadmare of a job well done. It was an awkward situation. Even if I was a gold-rank, I was still an adventurer, so I didn't want to be a glory hog.

Still, when it came to stampedes, there was no simple way to harvest resources from the massive amounts of monsters. The carcasses were usually left behind. The guild would then have specialists go collect stuff later and distribute them to the adventurers as rewards. The rewards were doled out based on participation, and the adventures that didn't do much of anything typically weren't rewarded. The way this was done was by having some trusted

adventurers act as watchdogs for the guild. Such individuals were heavily vetted for reliability before being entrusted with the role.

“But wait, another stampede? There’ve been tons of those lately, huh?”

“There certainly have. The reason isn’t known either. Whether they’re being spooked by something or not is to be determined...”

The most typical reason for a monster stampede was the presence of an invasive species. When a particularly powerful monster showed up, the weaker ones native to the area would find themselves driven from their homes. And eventually, they’d gather up and form a monster horde. It was the same with that giant Zaratan we’d encountered not too long ago. The creatures, startled by its sudden appearance, ended up grouping together and running amok until they formed a stampede.

That made me wonder, though... If the cause of that stampede was the Zaratan waking up...could that truly be called a coincidence? Perhaps the Zaratan sensed something as well. Zaratans were cowardly creatures despite their huge size. It was entirely plausible that it started to move because it sensed something it needed to flee from. The merging of the two worlds had increased the ambient mana in the atmosphere, resulting in the emergence of more Behemoths. More Behemoths showing up definitely meant more stampedes, but would it necessarily mean more stampedes everywhere at once?

“If you get reports of any Behemoths in the stampede areas, please let me know. I’ll deploy Frame Gears to help fight them off.”

“Of course. I’ll be sure to do just that.”

Slaying Behemoths was still a bit much for ordinary adventurers, so I was sure that could be excused. Either way, that didn’t help solve my current predicament. I was out of pocket money and out of ideas.

Hm... Maybe peace was a mistake after all. Wait, no! Don't think like that! Peace is good!

I left the adventurer's guild and started walking around town. I had no clue what to do next.

"Hm... Maybe I can start a business?"

Clothing had already been covered by Zanac. Hospitality was pretty much on lock with Micah. Aer's café was the most popular one around...and miscellaneous stuff like gadgets and ether vehicles were all under the thumb of Olba Strand. I wouldn't have felt right intruding on any of their business endeavors at this point, even if the ideas were originally mine to begin with. I'd also basically abandoned the Moon Reader library café idea, so I didn't even know what they were up to.

Money for clearing contracts was pretty good, but it was a feast or famine lifestyle. I wanted to start up some kind of long-term sustainable income, a steady stream of cash to keep me from getting into this kind of mess again. Plus, money wasn't the only issue I had. We needed specific materials for our aquatic refurbishing project. Iron, mithril, orichalcum, and so forth.

Should I just go mining myself? I dunno, it'd be kind of a pain... Are there any places where I can even get the materials directly? I guess it'd be useful if we had a mine, but I don't even know where we'd... Wait!

"Am I stupid or what? There's an entire mining nation I'm forgetting here."

Gandhilis, the Steel Nation. Most of the Gollems on the western continent were created from the raw materials produced by that country. I'd met their ruler before, so I could probably negotiate some kind of bulk deal at a discount. People could typically get price reductions for buying large amounts, so surely it'd be fine.

“All right, lemme double-check what I need with Doc Babylon,” I mumbled, then opened up a [Gate] and headed back to the castle.

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“Hey, you guys... Did you go all night without sleep or something?”

“Hm? Is that a problem?” Doc Babylon replied, tilting her head in response to my question.

It wasn’t a problem for her, sure, but that was only because she had an artificial body. In the case of Elluka and the professor, however, they were painfully prone to mortal fatigue. It was bad for their health.

I narrowed my eyes at Quun, my suspicion fairly plain.

“I-I slept properly, promise! Mother actually dragged me back down to the castle herself!”

I wasn’t surprised Leen had done that. She had a good grasp on the kind of person her daughter was, after all. I’d heard Quun still came here as early in the morning as possible, though. I wondered if there was a way to curb those bad habits of hers...but unfortunately, all I could really do was sigh.

“I’m going to Gandhilis to pick up some raw materials. I need to know what you guys need.”

“You’re going to Gandhilis, father? Take me with you!”

I wondered what Quun wanted in that country of all places.

“Oh, that sounds like a good idea. I wouldn’t trust Touya to know the best kinds of ores, so having Quun go with him is perfect. I approve.”

Ugh... Sure, I don’t know the best stuff, but it’s not like I couldn’t just cast [Analyze] to get a general idea, right?

“A general idea isn’t good enough, father. Iron, for example, can end up being completely different depending on the carbon content.

Pure iron has higher levels of plasticity, but it's still not enough to simply know that. You need an expert."

"All right, I get it. You can join me."

Quit using all those weird words I don't understand. It's like you're speaking in tongues. What the hell is plasticity?

"Ah, lass, let me know if you find any good deals."

"Yes, and don't mind the cost. Just beg Touya for it and I'm sure he'll surrender in no time flat."

Ugh, you devils! Quit corrupting my daughter! Damn it... The whole point of the trip to Gandhilis is to get stuff on the cheap. If I end up buying expensive stuff, then I'll have defeated the entire purpose!

The worst part was that I knew I wouldn't be able to resist if Quun actually started begging. The sight of my daughter looking up at me with tears in her eyes...was far too much for me to bear.

I decided I needed to call in reinforcements... Very special reinforcements, actually. And so, I turned away from the scheming researchers and quickly sent out a message for help on my smartphone.

"What the...? Why is mother here?! I thought this was a father-daughter trip!"

"Goodness, that's a mighty rude thing to say. I'm your parent too, Quun. Can't I join you?" Leen smirked as she spoke nonchalantly.

Quun looked positively incensed, but Leen appeared more amused than anything. She looked like she was enjoying herself, even...

"Ugh... And here I thought I'd be able to get father to buy some special Gollems!"

“Darling... Does she really have you so wrapped around her little finger?” Leen said, narrowing her eyes slightly as she looked from Quun, to me, and back again.

It's not my fault... I know she's using me but still...

Any father would jump at the chance to make his daughter happy! It was basic paternal instinct! Still, even I had to admit that buying her multiple Gollems was a very big ask.

All right. Now that I've got Leen here to back me up, it's off to Gandhilis!

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I called up the leader of Gandhilis and asked if I could buy the products directly from him. He gladly agreed and we negotiated a price. However, while we were on the call, he said he wanted to consult me about something, so I couldn't help but wonder what he wanted.

“Guess we'll find out soon.”

“Did you sort a deal out?”

“Sorta, yeah. But they want to speak to us at their palace.”

I shrugged over at Leen before opening up a **[Gate]**. Quun bounded through the portal before I had a chance to even step through. Clearly, she was in a hurry.

“Honestly... What an excitable girl. Just who does she remind me of, I wonder?”

“Hmph! I know that's a dig at me, but I seem to remember you being just as excitable when we were looking for Babylon's library.”

“I wasn't as bad as her.”

Oh, come on...even Paula knows that's not true.

“A child will naturally resemble their parents in some ways.”

“True enough.”

The two of us chuckled softly. Shortly after that, Quun poked her head through from the other side of the portal and said, “You two will have plenty of time to flirt later on. Let’s not keep Gandhilis waiting!”

“O-Oh, uh, right. Let’s go.”

“Y-Yes, let’s.”

Leen and I were a little embarrassed, but we quickly recovered and headed on our way.

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“Oh, father, that high mithril is a must.”

“Sure thing.”

I went around listening to Quun’s instructions, placing various ores and metals into my **[Storage]**.

After we met with the Gandhilis royal family, we were led to a storehouse beneath the palace that contained various processed and refined materials. Alloys and ingots and stones were piled up into huge, neat stacks all around us. It was insanely impressive just how much they had. Then again, they weren’t the Steel Nation for nothing.

Gandhilis was a country that was home to hundreds of mines. And thanks to their abundant underground resources and incredible smelting technology, pretty much every nation on the western continent relied on them for metal. The country had been invaded for its resources in the past, but it had managed to repel the invaders every single time. Foreigners were rarely prepared for the rugged terrain of the country, nor were they any match for the incredible military Gollems Gandhilis commanded.

It came as no surprise that many dwarves called Gandhilis home. I was just glad I hadn't brought Frei with me. She'd never want to go home.

"I wish we had a mine in Brunhild..."

"Now, now, Touya. The grass is often greener on the other side."

Leen had a point. I mean, I didn't know the first thing about mining. I couldn't tell the difference between ores at a glance, so not even my [Search] spell would help very much unless it was something really distinct.

I could identify Mithril or Orichalcum Golems, at least. I remember hunting down the latter a lot when I was trying to get the resources for Sue's Frame Gear. Back then, I had to hold myself in check to keep them from becoming an endangered species... The other world leaders also got mad at me for that incident...which was understandable, since I'd traveled around the world on my hunt. Thankfully, I managed to set that right by showing some of the countries the locations of nesting grounds where Mithril and Diamond Golems tended to gather.

"We're buying an awful lot, though... Do we really need this much just for one Over Gear?"

"We absolutely do! I can't go into the details, but I promise we need all this!"

"...Are you sure you're not just trying to scam extra materials out of him?"

"What a terrible accusation, mother! I'd never! Oh, let's buy these ones as well. Here, father."

Quun hurriedly dodged Leen's suspicions and moved on to the next set of metals.

...It definitely feels like we've got more than enough. There should be plenty of materials in Babylon's storehouse too, right?

I knew that Over Gears were bigger than Frame Gears, so I was prepared for some expenses...but it was beginning to reach the point where I feared I wouldn't be able to pay.

I couldn't help but let out a nervous sigh as I watched Quun pick out more and more ingots.

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"That's quite a lot... I can't help but wonder what it is you even intend to make."

The king of Gandhilis gasped in shock when I listed off everything I'd put in my **[Storage]**. But honestly, he couldn't have been any more horrified than I was. I'd ended up buying far, far more than I'd anticipated. Did they really need this much? Just how many things were they planning to make?

I could only assume they were going to make the Over Gear and the underwater Frame Gears at the same time. Quun wouldn't tell me, though. Instead, she just grinned. She and Doc Babylon were far too secretive for their own good. I was their sponsor, so they could at least let me in on the details!

"So, uh, how much am I gonna owe you?"

"O-Oh, well..."

The king looked a little awkward as he scrawled out a number on a piece of paper and handed it over to me.

Huh? Wait. This is way cheaper than I thought...

"Uh...isn't this too big a discount?"

“Yes, but there’s also the matter I wanted to discuss with you, remember? If you can help me with it, I’ll mark down the price to the amount on this paper.”

Figures there’d be a catch. Wonder what he wants from me.

“Look over this map, would you?” he requested as he spread a map of Gandhilis out over a nearby table. It was a map that had been created thanks to the data from my phone that I’d provided to the world leaders a while ago. The capital city of Gandhilis rested in the center.

“This city here, Mercurium, has the biggest mine in the entire nation. However, the Gandhola Mountains sit between it and the capital. The only way to transport ore from that bountiful mine is by expending vast resources flying them over the mountains or carting them around the entire stretch.”

Hmm... I bet you can’t carry much ore on an airship. It’s too heavy. The mountain routes aren’t great either. It’s a pretty long distance just to haul resources...which is why I think I know what he’s gonna ask.

“So you want me to dig you a tunnel here, huh?”

I tapped a finger on the map and traced it from Mercurium to the capital. The king smirked, and that was when I knew I was bang on the money.

“In all honesty, yes. That’s about what I need from you. We’ve always wanted to build a tunnel, but there are structural risks at play. Our previous attempts have led to cave-ins and other dangers. But this magic from the eastern continent, Earth magic specifically, may well be what we need.”

That made sense. Earth magic could be used to dig through an area while simultaneously reinforcing the surrounding area to prevent any cave-ins. It was basically the same as a tunneling shield from Earth.

“This is quite the distance, though...”

When we were preparing the trail for the magic train, I’d dug out a huge tunnel through the mountain range that bordered Belfast and Refreese, but this tunnel would be nearly twice as long as that. It was over a hundred kilometers at a glance. It wasn’t an impossible request, but I also didn’t feel like wasting a ton of time on it. And so, I decided that I’d just dig it all out in one go.

“All right, cool. I’ll do it.”

“Oh?! You will?!”

“Sure. So, where do you want me to start? Oh, and where do you want me to end it?”

“Mmm... The shortest distance between Mercurium and the capital would be the best, I think.”

As the king and I deliberated on the details, Leen was having a spot of tea with the queen. Leen was a grand duchess of Brunhild, after all. When it came to meeting other royals, she had to act the part. Her daughter, however...

“Oho ho ho ho ho! Ether lines all the way through the structure? Most fascinating... Oooh! Is it for emergency power settings, perhaps? That’s very, very fascinating...”

Quun was hassling one of the royal guard Gollems as it stood in the corner... I could only hope that nobody in the palace recognized her as my daughter...or we’d be breaking several rules of decorum.

The Golem remained motionless as Quun eagerly inspected every one of its joints. Even though I knew it was just a machine, I couldn’t help but feel bad for it.

“Sorry about her...”

“No, not at all. If anything, I’m honored by her keen interest in my nation’s Gollems.”

I smiled awkwardly at the king, and he simply smiled back. I could tell he was trying to be polite, given what I was about to do for his country.

“My, I’d expect no less from royal Gollems. What intricate wiring... Maybe I can open this one up and...”

You better stop, Quun... I can see veins bulging out of Leen’s forehead. It’ll be your funeral if she... Oh. Oh no! There she goes.

Leen quietly murmured an apology to the queen before standing up and marching straight toward Quun. I could barely watch what was about to unfold.

Quun didn’t even notice Leen’s approach. She was so absorbed in her inspection of the Golem that she couldn’t avoid the attack from behind. Leen’s fists closed in on Quun’s temples, grinding and pressing in hard.

“Hm... If we were to design it this way, then the friction coefficient would— Ow! Owowowowow! M-Mother?! Why?!”

“Quun... Would you please behave? Are you trying to make us look bad?”

I could only watch as Leen continued to press her knuckles in against Quun’s head. Even Paula seemed terrified by the sight.

“...Sorry about them,” I said.

“Oh, don’t worry...” the king replied, no longer bothering to hide his confusion.

We finished finalizing the start and end points for the tunnel, as well as agreeing upon the width. I figured if we introduced a magic train to Gandhilis later on, it’d be better to have a tunnel big enough for one.

“Darling, can we help dig the tunnel?”

“What, mother? Me too?”

“You’re benefiting from these materials, no? You should earn them.”

“Okaaay...” Quun grumbled quietly. She was probably just happy to be free of the deadly attack. I had a feeling Leen would’ve resumed her assault had the girl refused to join in.

Much like Leen, Quun had an aptitude for every magical element except darkness. That meant they could both use Earth magic. With their help, we’d get done that much faster.

I nodded my head, ready for some parent-child cooperation.

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“Come forth, Earth. Perforating Excavation: [Dig Spiral]!”

“Come forth, Earth. Barrier of the Mother Soil: [Earth Wall]!”

Leen and Quun took their positions on either side of the hole I’d made, immediately reinforcing the hole I’d dug out. The excavated soil was packed tight by the **[Earth Wall]** spell, then smoothed out and made into a perfect hallway.

I could dig about ten kilometers with each cast, then use **[Teleport]** to get to the end of the area I’d dug out. At that rate, it would only take about ten casts to reach the other side of the mountain range.

“We’ll need to put some wards up to keep monsters from nesting in here.”

If that happened, this place would turn into one long dungeon tunnel, and there’d be no way to escape if you ran into any monsters halfway through, which wouldn’t exactly be good for Gandhilis.

“We’ll have to add a rest stop too, I think. Maybe more than one, even.”

“A ventilation system would also work wonders.”

Gollem carriages moved at a speed of roughly twenty to thirty kilometers an hour. That meant spending about four or five hours in the tunnel, so a rest stop seemed necessary.

After digging about halfway, we carved out a large room to act as a rest facility. Then, I dug a few small holes upward for ventilation.

"I almost feel like a mole, digging like this."

"I can't blame you, darling. How do the dwarves live like this every day? Though, I suppose they're often hunting for ore, so it's probably worth it."

"It'd be nice if we hit an ore vein during all this. They might give us a discount if we strike big."

As we were talking, a huge mole with giant claws suddenly dug up from the soft earth below us. Paula trembled and clung to Leen's leg.

"Wow, that's rare! It's a giant mole. What are the odds of finding one of those?"

"It appeared because you tempted fate with your words, father."

"What? It wasn't my fault."

I'm pretty sure it was attracted to the sounds of our magic. It couldn't have shown up just because I mentioned moles, right?

"Graaargh!" the giant mole roared, glaring at us from down the passageway and brandishing its claws before charging directly at us.

Hmm... Maybe it heard me after all? It was probably attracted to our voices. Bet it thinks it found some food or something.

I wasn't really sure how to handle it, but...

"[Aqua Cutter]."

"Ah."

"Gyaghaaaah!"

Quun cut in with a spell, promptly dispatching the beast. The mole was at least six meters tall, yet it had been sliced in half like a stick of bamboo. I couldn't believe it...

"Honestly...you should consider the spell you're using, girl."

"Hm? But Fire magic wouldn't be good in this tunnel, right? Water magic made the most sense."

"You're not wrong about that, but your method was flawed. Even if darling places the body in **[Storage]**, you've still stained the ground with blood."

Leen wasn't wrong. I could already smell the coppery scent of blood as it pooled around the giant mole. It was rather gruesome.

I shoved the remains of the dead giant mole into my **[Storage]**, then used some Wind magic to waft the immediate scent of blood and decay off into the air.

"Using Water magic to choke the creature or Ice magic to seal its body or freeze it would've been smarter, dear."

"Hmph... I'll try that next time, I guess."

Leen smiled and patted her sulking daughter on the head. Quun was a smart girl, so she likely would have figured out that stuff on her own at some point...but that didn't save her from her own impulsive nature. She'd made a mistake.

We kept on digging, and whenever another mole or a giant worm or something showed up, Quun showed us that she'd learned her lesson by promptly dealing with them through her Ice magic. These creatures seemed to be pretty common in this earthy tunnel, so I made a mental note to put up proper wards once the construction was complete. As I thought about that, I casually activated **[Dig Spiral]** again, excavating more of the soil in front of me...except my spell ended up hitting an open area.

At first, I thought maybe we'd reached the other side, but it couldn't have been that. We still had a good deal of mountain to get through, after all.

"Hm? Is this a cave of some sort?"

"Oh. Perhaps it's a limestone cavern."

The tunnel was dark, so Leen and I had one **[Light Orb]** each cast above our heads, but even the light from those couldn't fully illuminate the hole I'd tunneled into.

Quun made an orb of her own and ran over to the opening.

Hey, wait! That's dangerous, you moron!

"My goodness! Father! Mother! Look down here!"

"Hm? What is it?"

Leen and I were a little surprised by Quun's excited voice, so we hurried over to look.

"Wait, what in the world?!"

There was a dim light within the cave, like the kind you'd see faintly emitted from luminous moss, but that wasn't what caught my attention. No, what I couldn't help but look away from was the sight of the massive city spread out beneath us. We were high up above it, but looking down I could see roads, buildings, obelisks, fortified structures, and even a pyramid. It was an underground city... Or, to be more specific, it was the ruins of an underground city. Some of the buildings were clearly in a state of disrepair...and I couldn't see any movement. Though, I was looking from a far distance, so I could've been wrong.

I wondered if it was a city from an ancient civilization or something. Whatever it was, I hadn't anticipated bumping into it during my tunnel digging operation.



“That’s incredible! I don’t remember anything like this being on the maps, not even in the future! What a discovery!”

“I have to agree with her, darling. This is quite the find. We might get some free resources out of this discovery.”

“Hah. That would be nice. Maybe I’ll save enough money to treat us to a nice dinner, huh?”

Quun was raving excitedly, while Leen and I exchanged some playful banter. Still, there was a nagging feeling at the back of my mind that I’d just found something troublesome. After all, Quun was acting as if she’d never even heard of this place. Did that mean I’d changed the future? Or perhaps Gandhilis had elected to hide it? But why would they have done that?

I quickly called up the king and he seemed just as excited about the discovery as Quun was. He immediately said he’d be on his way, then hung up.

...He’s on his way? But even if he comes by airship, it’ll take a while to get all the way through here... Maybe I should go pick him up? Nah, I’m sure it’ll be fine. Guy’ll be an hour or two tops, probably.

“Father! Father! Let’s investigate! Please? Can we?!”

Hmm... I doubt I’m gonna be able to keep Quun under control until the king gets here. We should probably scout it out and make sure it’s safe, right? It’d be bad if the place was home to monsters, like those moles and worms.

In the end, we decided to follow Quun through the hole I’d opened. The way down was a sheer drop, so I used **[Fly]** to get us down safely.

I landed in what seemed to be a plaza, but the paving stones were cracked and many of the buildings were on the verge of collapse. Like I'd assumed, it was an abandoned city.

"It's like this because protective spells aren't very common on the western continent. Only Golems get that kind of treatment, as far as I know."

"Yes. It'd be difficult to protect an entire city from wear and tear without large-scale protection spells."

Doc Babylon had told me that the buildings from her era were usually reinforced with Earth magic, then kept free from natural erosion with protection spells. However, because such magic wasn't common on the western continent, it wasn't used for things as regular as buildings. Only especially valuable things were treated with that kind of magic. That potentially meant we could find preserved treasure...

I wasn't quite as excited as Quun, but the prospect did intrigue me. But, as if to put a damper on my excitement, I suddenly heard a noise from the dark.

"...You guys hear that? Is something out there?"

More noises began to ring out from the dark. The three of us stood on edge, waiting to face whatever was shambling our way.

We kept hearing metallic clunking noises...and before long, a Golem emerged from the shadows. It was slowly crawling our way. It was about the same size as an average man. At a glance, one might assume him to be a knight clad in brass armor, but his face was largely featureless and he had a single mechanical eye that slowly veered from left to right. Four exhaust vents jutted out from its back, a glittering gas slowly leaking from the pipes. The gas also vented out of the Golem's limbs and joints as if it was on the verge of falling apart.

Several of these brass Golems shambled out from the dark of the city. They weren't armed, but the way they slowly lumbered or crawled toward us made them look like zombies from a horror flick.

"Never thought the city would be filled with weird Golems..."

"What shall we do, darling? Should we destroy them?"

"Huh?! What was that, mother?! These are valuable legacy Golems! We couldn't possibly do that! If we break them, we might not be able to reassemble them!"

"...Please save your troublesome prattling for another time, Quun."

Leen let out a frustrated sigh as Quun began to panic. I could understand my daughter's feelings, but I wasn't about to let these things just attack us.

Since Quun seemed worried, I quietly decided to at least spare one. I could just deactivate it instead of destroying it, after all.

Right when I began to invoke **[Eternal Coffin]** to capture some Golems, a woman's voice rang out, saying, "Fall back, my children. You shall not harm these intruders."

The sudden voice caught us unawares, but then the brass Golems began to slowly slink away from us. And then, out of the shadows, came a woman. She wore a loose-fitting white toga, the kind you'd stereotypically see in media depicting the Romans. Her silver hair glimmered in the dark and her eyes gleamed gold. A beautiful smile crept across her face as she bowed in the dark.

"Welcome, over dwellers. Welcome to Agartha, the mechanical city."

The silver-haired woman...warmly welcomed us.

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"Agartha?"

“That’s right. This city was founded by refugees who fled Darnassia, a civilization that once thrived to the north,” the silver-haired woman answered, smiling all the while.

“...Darnassia? Never heard of it.”

“Darnassia was one of two ancient countries that once vied for supremacy on the western continent, father,” Quun chimed in, filling in the blanks.

I’d heard of the two ancient civilizations, but I didn’t know Darnassia was one of them. In the Reverse World’s history, legends told of an ancient Gollem war that erupted between two nations, leading to widespread devastation. The current world of the western continent was what rose from the ashes of that war.

“During the great war, there were those who didn’t wish to engage in combat. They fled their homeland, came across this underground facility, and hoped to wait out the conflict here. Yet decades passed and the war showed no signs of ending, thus the people came to call Agarthia their new home.”

“Hm... That makes sense. From what I recall, the war lasted over three hundred years...” Quun mumbled.

Her words seemed to corroborate the woman’s story. Though personally, I found the idea of a war that could last hundreds of years hard to swallow. Then again, there was the Three Hundred and Thirty Five Years’ War back on Earth. It had technically ended after a year when one of the sides surrendered, but there was no formal treaty signed by either party. So later on, historians noticed this and went, “Wait..did this war actually end?” and then a formal declaration was finally signed over three hundred years later. It was a funny story, really. If only all wars ended so peacefully, without a single shot fired.

“Does that mean you’re a descendant of those ancients?” Leen asked, raising a brow as she brought her question to the toga-wearing woman who simply shook her head in response.

Oh? She’s not?

“The people that settled here slowly dwindled in number, and after about two hundred years, they all died out. It’s difficult for humans to survive beneath the ground, away from the light above, after all.”

Oh, yeah... No daylight. Being cooped up with the curtains closed is bad enough, so I can only imagine what living this far beneath the ground must be like.

“Ah. It was likely due to Vitamin D deficiency. That can leave one far more susceptible to death through disease, and is a considerable cause of osteoporosis.”

“You sure know plenty, Leen...”

“I read about it in a book I brought back from your home, darling.”

Leen had picked up just about every textbook she could get her hands on during our honeymoon. I wouldn’t have been surprised if she knew more than me about Earth at this point.

Hold up... If all the people died, then what’s with this woman? Who is she? Didn’t that war end like five thousand years ago? Unless...

Quun suddenly snapped her fingers, her eyes widening.

“I see! You’re a humanoid Gollem, aren’t you?”

“I am. My name is PEL-42. I am from the Perlagione Series of healthcare Gollems. My individual name is Perlulushka,” Perlulushka replied, bowing her head.

A humanoid Gollem, huh...? Legacy Gollems really are on another level. I took her for a human. Though I guess looking at her eyes, the

irises are a little different from a normal person's. Honestly, she's like Cesca or any of the Babylon sisters. It's pretty crazy.

Leen shot a confused glance at her and asked, "You're a healthcare Golem? Then why did the people here die?"

"They died in spite of my best effort. As generations continued, fear of the outer world only intensified. They chose to wither here instead of venture outside. The land above was an earthly hell, or so they said. Thus, they resolved to stay."

Hmm... Guess the folklore carried on from generation to generation until the younger people were too scared to go up there. Well, I can't exactly blame the refugees for not wanting their kids to go above ground and possibly face murderous robots.

"So you've been tending to this empty city all this time?"

"I have. Even after this place became the city of Golems, even after all the people died, I have remained. I stay in a low power state, but occasionally I wake to survey the surroundings. I've taken it upon myself to be the warden of this dead city, as well as the Gigantes."

"The what now?"

Perlulushka raised her hand slowly, pointing off toward something far in the dark. The dim lights of the city were enough for me to make out that she was pointing at something large not far from the pyramid-like building, but I couldn't figure out exactly what it was.

"Come forth, Light! Sublime Incandescence: [Megabright]."

Leen cast a spell to illuminate the dark. The ball of light she conjured made its way to the tip of the pyramid, lighting up the entire city as if it was just a small room. And that was when I saw what was behind the pyramid.

A massive machine, half-buried in a wall, towered over the city. It was an unfathomably large Golem with a strangely humanoid form.

However, the most shocking thing about it was that I'd seen something identical to it before.

"The Hecatoncheir?!"

It looked almost identical to the ancient weapon that the witch-king of Isengard had attempted to restore.

"...Hecatoncheir? You mean the one you fought in Isengard, father?!"

"Oh? You're familiar with the endweapons? That machine over there, Gigantes, is a match for the Hecatoncheir. It is the foul legacy left behind by my ancient masters..."

In other words...this ancient city wasn't a city at all. It was a production facility of sorts. A factory that rested deep underground that produced Darnassia's most heinous weapons of war.

When the refugees had come here, everyone working in the facility was dead. Their bodies were twisted in agony. It wasn't known if there was an accident, or if there'd been some kind of sabotage involving poison gas, but once they'd confirmed the immediate area was safe, the Darnassian refugees decided to live in this place. As frightening as it was, it was safer than the war above ground.

Unfortunately, the people gradually learned horrifying information as they combed over the research notes that had been left behind. The Gigantes weapon had already been completed. It was just in a dormant state.

"The Gigantes is currently in a state I would refer to as sleep mode. But if it was to be activated, it would begin to act based upon its final orders. And regrettably, it had only one command. Defeat the enemy."

"And who would be the enemy?"

"All Golems that aren't affiliated with Darnassia."

What the hell kind of order is that?! If this thing wakes up, it's just gonna start attacking every Golem in the world!

"The Gigantes has no reason to exist other than that one order imprinted within it. Even without a contracted master, it shall attempt to carry out that duty indiscriminately. And it won't just stop at Golems either. Anything unrelated to its homeland will be scorched. People, cities, countries. That is why this is such a foul legacy. For when it awakes, it shall raze the entire world."

The witch-king had mentioned something about how at the end of the great war, multiple countries scrambled to make ultimate weapons. Perlulushka had referred to this thing as an endweapon too. I could only assume the Gigantes was made to combat whatever country had produced the Hecatoncheir.

"This is apocalyptic... What do you make of it, darling?"

"Hrm... Sounds like it'll be a problem, so maybe we should just trash it."

"You can't think of destroying it! That would be a waste! Er, I mean...I know it's a threat to world peace and all, but still..." Quun objected before shirking back as both Leen and I glared at her.

This is kind of an annoying situation, though. I'm in another country's territory, so I can't just destroy this thing without running it by the king. I dunno if I have the right to do that. Sure, I found it, but it's technically in Gandhilese territory. Still, even if Gandhilis claims it, I'll have to make sure it can't actively be used. That's way too risky.

"Can I go take a look at it?"

"...So long as you do nothing to disturb it, you may. Please take extreme caution."

Golems without masters were still conditioned to obey humans within all reasonable bounds, so Perlulushka accepted my request. It was probably a little awkward for her, though, since she was the

protector of this place. I could understand her apprehension. Plus, the first thing it would target upon awakening would be the Gollems in the immediate area...and she probably wasn't that eager to die after surviving this long.

Perlulushka led us over to the Gigantes. As I got closer, I realized it wasn't really embedded in a wall, it was more that the cavernous area around it had caved in and covered it.

Right when I was about to take another step, Perlulushka stopped me.

"Don't go any further than that. Watch and see."

Perlulushka picked up a small rock and tossed it toward the Gigantes. The second the rock flew through the air and made it a little bit past where I was standing, a laser sight beam suddenly locked onto it. Then, a gun popped out of the gigantic Golem and fired a single shot, blasting it to smithereens.

The sight caused Quun to blink in surprise. Then she smirked and said, "So it has an active interception system, does it?"

"It does. The system functions independently of the Gigantes. It targets anything and everything within a certain range."

Wow, talk about intense. Guess that explains why nobody from Agarthia ever destroyed the thing.

"So, uh, what do you want to do with it?"

"We of this city are Gollems. We obey the will of mankind. Whatever you and the other humans decide is our course, though my personal hope is that you will fulfill the wishes of those who once called Agarthia home. That you will destroy the Gigantes and restore peace to this land."

The refugees who came to settle Agarthia must have spent generations trembling in fear of not only the outside world, but this

terrifying Golem on their doorstep. Given that she must have been witness to this generational trauma, I could understand Perlulushka's feelings.

"Father. **[Prison]** should suffice here, no?"

"Yep, yep..."

I couldn't help but feel like my daughter was treating me like a utility tool, but I understood what she was getting at. And so, I activated **[Prison]** and took a step forward. A tracing laser sight settled on me, then several others, but none of their shots hit me.

Perlulushka stared in wonder as the bullets bounced off the invisible barrier around me. I was a little amused at how expressive she was. Given that she was a medical machine, she probably needed to be able to display more humanity than most of her fellow Golems.

It would've been more convenient just to destroy the turrets firing at us, but I didn't want to disturb the Gigantes and wake it by accident. It was annoying, but it was better to be safe than sorry.

I had Perlulushka, Quun, and Leen join me inside the protective barrier. We then made our way toward the Gigantes's foot together.

"Oh yes, the mana circuit here is alive and well... The ether lines are running all along its surface... Incredible. Does this have a dampening effect, I wonder? It's almost like a soft defensive line of magic. Not even charged bullets would have any effect..."

...Crap. Quun's nerding out again. Guess I can't be surprised, but it sure is tiring.

"Speak more plainly, Quun. Can we destroy this thing?"

"Well...the ether lines and the mana circuit work in tandem to create something equivalent to human skin. In other words, when it's attacked, or touched, the ether lines work like nerves to tell the Golem what happened. If you don't destroy it in one instantaneous

attack, the Gigantes will awaken. Even the slightest touch is probably enough to make it activate.”

...So, in other words, we can't go near this thing without risking an extinction-level threat. I sure dug the wrong tunnel today, didn't I...?

“Hmm... It'll be a bit of a pain, but I can probably destroy it in one go. I could open up a **[Gate]** under it and send it into a volcano, maybe...”

“I'm not so sure that would do the trick, darling. Its defensive functions would probably shirk off the lava, and then it would simply crawl back out of the crater.”

Leen promptly shot down my suggestion, and I couldn't argue with her. At the very least, I couldn't dismiss the possibility. I didn't want to gamble with something so risky either...since an exploding volcano wouldn't have been much good for the world.

“It might be a good idea to move it, though. If we transport it someplace uninhabited and fight it with multiple Frame Gears, I'm sure we'd win.”

That definitely made sense to me. It was an apocalyptic weapon, but it couldn't be stronger than the wicked god. I was sure I'd be able to take it down if I had all my wives supporting me.

Hmm... I really need to talk to the king about all this, but he's probably left the castle by now, so I can't just teleport to him.

I estimated that it'd probably be about an hour or so before he reached us, so I decided to return to Agarthia and wait. We left the Gigantes behind and had Perlulushka show us around the city. Since the place was an ancient weapons facility, Quun was practically giddy as she walked through the streets.

An hour passed by in the blink of an eye as Quun meticulously documented everything she came across. At one point I looked up

and noticed King Gandhilis and his men peering through the hole I'd made above.

"I had no idea my country was home to such ancient terror..." King Gandhilis mumbled as he and his entourage looked across the city and the Gigantes with faces that seemed both awestruck and horrified at the same time.

I quickly introduced Perlulushka and briefed them on the matter at hand. The Gigantes situation wasn't something I wanted to neglect, after all.

"An ancient civilization's weapon of mass destruction... I knew of Isengard's, but to think we had one too... This is indeed a troubling matter."

King Gandhilis sat there in thought, pinching the bridge of his nose. I could understand his dilemma. Gandhilis had a great many engineers and researchers who would surely have loved to investigate every inch of the ancient weapon, but if they handled it in the wrong way, then the entire world would be at risk.

"Your Majesty, this is a prime opportunity for our nation. Should we reverse engineer this Gollem, we can learn untold secrets of the past..."

"And risk doing what Isengard did? Risk scarring the world further? Are you mad? I can't simply weigh this situation myself, it is far beyond a single man such as I..." King Gandhilis let out a deep sigh as he admonished the soldier who'd spoken up.

Eventually, he stood up, looking over at the Gigantes, and said, "This ancient technology would be a boon to Gandhilis, that much is true. Yet I cannot risk the safety of my people. I would defer to the Grand Duke of Brunhild on this matter. However, should there be wreckage after all is said and done...I would like to have my engineers examine it."

“Sure, that sounds fair. We’ll have Elluka and some assistants go over it with you.”

The assistants I had in mind were Doc Babylon and maybe some of the gynoids, but I had a feeling the professor would want to investigate the Gollem as well.

“I’ll move the Gigantes to a place without any people in it, and then we’ll fight it until it’s broken.”

I’m gonna have to call everyone in for this, aren’t I? I guess that includes the kids too...? I dunno, though.

“Oh, might I be able to watch you fight it?”

“I would also like to see the Gigantes face its end.”

Both King Gandhilis and Perlulushka requested to be present for the battle. Given that Perlulushka had been watching over it for thousands of years, I could understand why she’d want to see the end of it. The king probably wanted to confirm the destruction for the sake of his country, and I didn’t have a problem with offering the two of them peace of mind.

“Mmm... I guess it’s fine, but...”

I didn’t know what kind of weaponry the thing had, so I didn’t want to put either of them at risk. In the end, I decided to set up a live feed and have them watch on a monitor. I also figured that the kids could watch the feed as well, so they could feel involved without being in any actual danger.

...It was starting to feel like I was setting up some exclusive showing for a mecha movie or something.

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“It is huge, it is... Far larger than the one in Isengard,” Yae murmured as she looked up at the Gigantes in wonder.

We'd managed to take out the Hecatoncheir with just three Frame Gears. My Reginleif, Yae's Schwertleite, and Hilde's Siegrune. If this thing was about as strong as the Hecatoncheir, then I wouldn't need all my wives to fight it, but its strength wasn't actually known to me. Since it was made by a different country, it probably had different capabilities...and I didn't want to take any chances.

"Where are we going to move it?"

"I was thinking either some place in Isengard or Yulong. Just in case, you know?" I replied, quickly answering Linze's question. But on second thought, I decided that Isengard was the best bet. That country was basically completely ruined, while Yulong had begun to slowly build up various villages and settlements from its earlier destruction. I didn't see the need to get in their way if they planned on civilizing the place.

"So we're all going to fight it?"

"If you're up for it, yeah..."

Even though I was talking to Yumina, she wasn't the one who responded to my proposition.

"I wanna! I'm up for it! Dad! Please! Me!"

"Yeah! Me too! C'mon, lemme at it!"

Linne and Allis jumped up and waved their hands. I let out a small sigh, wondering why Allis was even here. I'd warped back to Brunhild to get Yakumo to help bring the others over, and for some reason, Allis tagged along. Ende was there as well, of course.

"No. It's too dangerous. You guys can watch on the monitor, okay?"

"It's okay! We can pilot Frame Gears!"

Hmm... I know they can do that, but still... I guess there's the auto-eject function in case of extreme emergency, but I'm really not sure this is... Huh? What's this presence?

“Fret not, dearie. Should the worst come to pass, I shall see them to safety.”

Granny Tokie suddenly appeared, walking over from behind Linne and the others. I hadn’t seen her in a while. Apparently, she’d been busy with some business in the divine realm, but I didn’t know what kind. She had dominion over Space-time, which meant she could freely teleport or even freeze the flow of time itself. Looking over the safety of a couple of children was nothing to her.

As if emboldened by Granny Tokie’s words, Allis and Linne looked back up at me with puppy dog eyes.

“I’m not sure if Linze and Ende are okay with it, though...”

“I’m sure Linne will do fine! And I know Granny Tokie will keep her safe. I approve!”

“Look, man...we both know I don’t want her to do this...but she’s gonna end up getting her way no matter what I say.”

Linze replied with enthusiasm, while Ende replied with dejected resignation.

“Go ahead, Linne. You can borrow my Gerhilde. I think it’ll be easier for you to fight in than Linze’s Helmwege, right?”

“Yay! Thank you so much!” Linne exclaimed as she leaped forward and gave Elze a big hug.

Yeah, I guess as far as punching goes, Gerhilde’s the best Frame Gear for the job. Wait...can you even punch this thing?

I looked up at the massive Gigantes, wondering if smacking it around would even do anything.

“What about you, Allis? Gonna take your dad’s Dragoon?”

“Umm...I don’t really like the Dragoon... It’s too speedy...”

“What?!” Ende yelled, his shoulders slumping.

Ende's Dragoon was a specialized Frame Gear that emphasized mobility over all else. It fought the exact same way he did, effectively. The mention of it reminded me that it was probably due an upgrade. I hadn't given the thing any attention in a long time. Allis could coat her Frame Gear with crystalline armor, so that still gave weaker Frame Gears like the Dragoon a combative edge...but she didn't seem to like the idea.

Allis suddenly spoke up, saying, "Umm...I want to ride Ortlinde, but...I probably can't, right?"

"Hm? My Frame Gear?" Sue mumbled, looking over in confusion.

Oh... Yeah. Sue's Ortlinde is definitely second only to Elze's Gerhilde when it comes to punching and kicking, and it's the most defensive out of all of our Frame Gears as well.

"My Ortlinde is far slower than your father's Dragoon. Are you sure you're fine with that? I suppose I could let you use it..."

"I am! I'd really love to! Thank you!" Allis cheered and gave Sue a big hug.

Ende, unfortunately, continued to mutter quietly to himself, sounding rather depressed.

Yakumo, Frei, Quun, Yoshino, Arcia, and Elna declined to participate. They were happy just watching on the monitors. Well, Quun wasn't exactly happy. She thought destroying Gigantes was a terrible waste, after all.

We decided that Yumina, Lu, Sakura, and Leen would serve as the rear support team, while Linne, Allis, Yae, and Hilde would be in the vanguard. Linze, Ende, and I would respond accordingly when we were needed.

We set up the monitors in Agarth's plaza, then had Kougyoku's birds carry the cameras to shoot a live broadcast.

All right...let's take down this hunk of junk!

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I hopped to Isengard to scout out the area before the battle. It would've been bad if there were people around when we awoke the Gigantes, after all.

Isengard's capital, Isenberg, was still in a state of ruin. I ran a **[Search]** to look it over and quickly realized there weren't any humans around. Though while I was at it, I ran another search.

"...Run search. Evil cyborgs."

I'd wondered if that masked woman and her weird minions that Yakumo had mentioned were around, but apparently, they weren't. They might've left after Yakumo escaped, fearing that someone like me might show up in her wake. Whatever the case, I'd secured the knowledge nobody was in the area. Even if we got a little rowdy, there'd be no risk of hurting anyone.

The plan was simple enough. I'd bring all the others over and have them board their Valkyrie Gears. Then, I'd head back to the underground city and pick up Gigantes using **[Gate]**. After that, I'd travel to Isengard with Reginleif...and just kind of play it by ear at that point.

I brought everyone over as planned and they got into their Frame Gears. Ende was joining in the fight as well, presumably to keep an eye on Allis.

"Wow! I can see all over the place! This thing feels so much heavier than normal Frame Gears too! Amazing!" Allis exclaimed as she stomped around in the Ortlinde Overlord, which she'd apparently never tried out before. She flexed the mech's arms, waving them around wildly.

Ende nervously stood nearby in his Dragoon, watching her intently.

Relax, old man. She'll be fine.

"Hiyah!"

As Allis did that, Linne was flexing her skills in Gerhilde. She fired out a pile bunker shot from one of the arms. She had a surprisingly good level of control over the machine, as if she'd piloted it before. I personally felt she wasn't quite as adept as Elze, though that was only natural.

Linze was looking over her daughter, much like how Ende was watching his own, but she was much calmer than he was. She had confidence in Linne's skills, so there was no point in her fretting.

Typically, a special Frame Gear could only be piloted by the person it was made for, but there was a degree of leeway for immediate family members or those with similar magical signatures. Since Elze was Linne's aunt, they were close enough for there to be no issues in terms of piloting. And as far as Allis went, she was part Phrase...so that made her a lot more adaptable when it came to magical signatures. Though that could've actually been a trait from Ende, honestly. I didn't actually know.

All right, they're all geared up. Time to head back to Gandhilis and send the Gigantes over...

I made it back to Agarthia and saw everyone huddled around the monitors I'd set up. The cameras mostly showed Ortlinde Overlord and Gerhilde warming up.

King Gandhilis was staring intently at the screen as he asked, "These are the gigantic Gollems found in the Duchy of Brunhild, aren't they? The Frame Gears, yes? I've heard much about them."

"They're not exactly Gollems, but...yeah. Basically. They're what we'll be using to take the Gigantes down."

“Are you sure they’ll be enough? Weapons of its scale brought devastation to our entire continent in the long past, you know...?”

“I’m sure it’s a powerful weapon, but it can’t match up to the wicked god. I’ve beaten things far stronger than this before, and I have a backup plan in case stuff goes south. Anyway, I’ll send it over now.”

In the absolute worst-case scenario, I was ready to fully unleash my Divine Apotheosis and use the power of my godhood to obliterate the Gigantes. That kind of attack would totally trash the Gigantes, though, and I had a feeling both Quun and Gandhilis in general wouldn’t appreciate that solution, so I wanted to avoid it if possible.

All right, I should quit wasting time. Let’s just warp this damn thing over already.

“**[Gate].**”

I opened up a portal beneath the Gigantes, and it fell through the bottom to Isengard along with bits of rock and soil. As it fell, a flash of light roared out from the Gigantes. I had a feeling that the sudden motion was registered as an attack, which woke it from sleep mode.

I closed up the big portal, then opened up a smaller one underneath me. In a flash, I was standing in Isengard. As I looked around, I saw that the Gigantes had landed exactly where I’d planned, but it was already rising from the heap of rubble. It was much smaller than the wicked god, but its body was still larger than the Hecatoncheir. In terms of size, it was comparable to an Advanced Phrase. And as far as its actual form went, it looked like a gigantic humanoid. It wasn’t quite as streamlined or sophisticated as a Frame Gear, however, so it still looked pretty blocky and rough around the edges. Something told me that it hadn’t been created with style in mind. It looked more like a mishmash of various parts that didn’t quite fit properly.

Several pipes and vents jutted out from its back, fumes of glimmering residue sputtering out. It had long, bulky arms and thick

tree trunk legs, but its head was tiny, giving it a somewhat uneven look. Its head was shaped like an armet helm, with no facial features to speak of. A faint red camera light peeked out from the eye slit, moving left to right and back again.

“Bhhhhhh...”

It slowly creaked and rumbled, its massive arms rising upward.

“Ah! It’s lunging forward! Yae, Hilde! Incoming!”

“Mmm?! Understood!”

“G-Got it!”

Yae’s Schwertleite and Hilde’s Siegrune were right in front of the Gigantes, so they quickly responded to Yumina’s command. The very next instant, the Gigantes brought its huge fists slamming into the ground. The earth rushed out of the impact point like a tsunami of soil. It rumbled outward, surging like a mighty wave, kicking up rock, dirt, and dust in its wake.

Had they not heeded Yumina’s warning, Yae and Hilde definitely would’ve been caught right in the middle of it. I had a feeling Yumina’s precognition had been triggered.

“That ability’s not unlike the **[Earth Wave]** spell... I wonder if that’s a Golem skill...or perhaps something more akin to an artifact?” Leen murmured. She couldn’t help but analyze the situation from within her Gringerde, but I personally felt we could save the postulating for later. Quun would probably have a lecture prepared for us by the time we got back, anyway.

Wait, I shouldn’t just stand around gawking.

“Reginleif!” I called my Frame Gear out from **[Storage]** and immediately used **[Fly]** to rocket into the cockpit. It’d been a long time since I’d actually fought in it, come to think of it.

As my Reginleif took flight, I received a communication from Linze's Helmwig.

"Touya. Could you let us try on our own first?"

"Huh? I mean, sure, but are you sure it'll be fine?"

I wasn't necessarily worried about my wives, but I had some level of concern about Allis and Linne. They weren't used to the Frame Gears they were piloting, and they were up against an unknown foe. Even if I knew they'd be safe, I couldn't help but wonder if they'd be able to fight to their fullest.

"I can do it without your help, father! Just watch us!"

"Linne's right! You can stand by, okay?! You too, dad!"

"W-Wait, me too?! But Allis...!" Ende exclaimed, letting out a sorrowful yelp.

Hmm... I guess it'll be fine. Linze and the others have divine blessings on their side, and there are seven of them here. Couple that with the fact that Granny Tokie is watching over the kids and it's kind of overkill even without me.

"All right. I'll stay back. But if it gets too bad, I'm interfering."

"Okay!"

I could hear Linne and Allis cheering happily through the speakers. I also heard Ende yell some kind of protest, but I elected to ignore it.

"All right, let's do this! Charge!"

"Wait there. It would be folly to charge in against a foe you know nothing about. We should wait and observe its movements before making our own move."

"Aww... Okaaay," Linne mumbled, pouting a little as Hilde stopped her. However, I definitely agreed. There was no point in rushing in.

At that exact moment, the Gigantes's shoulder armor opened outward like a gull-wing door, revealing rows of missile pods inside.

Vwoom.

A roaring sound rang out as hundreds of missiles were launched into the air, glimmering trails of magical residue trailing behind them.

"I've got this! Stardust Shell!" Allis roared as she charged forward with the Ortlinde Overlord, raising its left hand high into the air.

Several starry lights coalesced above the battlefield, weaving together into a huge defensive barrier. The missiles struck the wall of stars, exploding on impact. Those that were merely deflected detonated in the debris below instead.

The destructive power unleashed by the missiles was immense... Had the Gigantes unleashed them down in Agarth, the entire place would've caved in.

Once the hail of missiles ceased, the Ortlinde Overlord's right arm came swooping upward.

"Eat this! Cannon Knuckle!"

The Ortlinde Overlord's right arm detached from the elbow and flew over toward the Gigantes. It was quite the delightful rocket punch to witness from a distance.

"And now this! Crystal Arm!"

The airborne rocket fist suddenly found itself coated in phrasium, coiled with crystal vines until it was more like a gigantic arrow barreling through the air. Compared to the Gigantes, even the thirty-meter Ortlinde Overlord looked small. If the Gigantes was the size of a human man, then the Ortlinde was a baby in comparison.

However, a sharpened rock the size of a baby's fist would still hurt an adult if it went hurtling into them at high speed.

The Gigantes took the impact square in the chest...yet the mighty impact failed to make a dent in the Gollem's armor.

"What?!" Allis exclaimed, letting out a surprised yell. The rocket fist then fell limply to the ground, and the Ortlinde quickly reeled it back in.

"It didn't work?"

"Even the Ortlinde's fist wasn't enough...?"

Hilde and Yae looked up at the Gigantes in shock. As far as raw destructive power went, the Ortlinde was the strongest Frame Gear in our entire arsenal. The downside was that it was fairly easy to avoid its attacks, since they were slow, but this had been a direct hit, and it was even coated in phrasium. Just how thick was this Gollem's armor? I wondered if it was made out of something equivalent to phrasium.

"When the fist hit it, I heard a peculiar noise... It was like hard rubber, I think...almost like a reverb of sorts. I don't think the chest armor is metal..." Sakura said, sending us a message from her Rossweisse.

Huh, really? So it's like a shock absorber or something?

"Then we must slash it, we must. Sakura-dono, support us with your magic, please!"

"Got it."

As soon as Yae finished talking, Rossweisse's symphonic horns moved from its back to its shoulders. A song then began to blare from the speakers, and it was a melody that I recognized...

Sakura's singing voice was as beautiful as ever. The song was written as the main theme song to a movie in which the main character rode a funny-looking white dragon. The song started and ended with a fade in and a fade out, suggesting that the song had no beginning or

end. Apparently, it was deliberately done that way, as the story itself was a never-ending one.

All the Frame Gears in Sakura's range were immediately bolstered.

"Kokonoe Secret Style: Phoenix Blaze!"

"Lestian Sacred Sword: First Cutter!"

Yae's Schwertleite and Hilde's Siegrune blasted forward, their slashes rippling through the air as they lunged toward the Gigantes. The massive foe was unable to avoid the incoming attacks, resulting in direct slashes to the flanks of its legs.

The Golem didn't come out of the attack unscathed, losing a piece of its outer plating. However, the attack barely did anything at all, the results comparable to a tiny scrape if it had been on a person.

"Hm... It was not quite enough, it was not."

"Yes, its size is certainly an issue."

The Gigantes reflexively swung down at Yae and Hilde, as if it had flown into a rage. The girls easily avoided the attack, but the impact kicked up more debris and dust. Fortunately, they'd already anticipated that, so the flying rubble was easily slashed down in midair. The speed at which it all happened was hard to process, even for me.

Laser sights suddenly appeared all over the battlefield, and turrets jutted out of almost every part of the Golem's body.

"Whoa! What?!"

Linne's Gerhilde seemed to be within range, and it was already under attack. Luckily, it was a dexterous Frame Gear, so Linne was able to deftly avoid the hail of fire.

"Linne! Grab on!"

"Mom!"

Helmwige rushed over in flight mode and swooped in low above Gerhilde. Linne had Gerhilde grab the hook that Linze dropped from above, allowing her to fly off into the sky with her mother.

The Gigantes suddenly looked upward, its two head-mounted cannons moving to track the girls as they fled upward.

“I don’t think so.”

Seconds later, a storm of crystal bullets smashed into the Gollem’s face, courtesy of Leen’s Grimgerde. That attack didn’t do any meaningful damage, but it was enough to grab the enemy’s attention. The Gigantes was now solely focused on Grimgerde instead. It lunged forward with a sweeping punch, but Grimgerde merely floated above the point of impact.

I was actually a little worried about Leen’s ability to dodge, since the only Frame Gear less mobile than Grimgerde was Ortlinde in its Overlord form.

More laser sights came out from the Gigantes’s turrets, this time trying to focus on both Ende in his Dragoon and Lu in her Waltraute. However, the two were far too agile for it to get a clean shot in, so they simply weaved their way across the ground and made it waste its shots.

As all this went on, Yumina’s Brunnhilde slowly picked off each turret, one after the other, with its sniper. I was honestly shocked by how accurate her aim was...

“Hm? It has recovered from our earlier attack, it has?”

Yae’s voice made me raise an eyebrow, and I quickly noticed that the wound inflicted by their earlier attack had regenerated. Apparently, it had self-restorative capabilities much like the Hecatoncheir. In other words, the only way to beat it was to destroy its interior faster than it could repair itself. It wouldn’t be able to restore critical damage, after all.

“Dad! Get me a weapon! Something good for kicking and punching!”

“Huh?”

A message suddenly came in from Linne in Gerhilde. I looked over and saw she was riding Helmwig through the air like a surfboard.

Didn't you say you wanted to do this without my help...? Well, whatever.

“Uhhh... Okay... Mode change: Knuckle & Greave!”

The Fragarach plates on Reginleif's back disconnected and flew over to Gerhilde as they changed shape midair.

Linze told me not to interfere, so this is all you're getting.

Gerhilde's fists were coated with phrasium, but clearly, Linne needed something a little extra to get the most out of her attacks.

The Fragarachs transformed into gauntlets that wrapped themselves around Gerhilde's fists, spiked prongs jutting out of the knuckles. They also wrapped around Gerhilde's legs, creating reinforced leg armor with spikes on them

“All right! Now I can do this!”

Helmwig zoomed forward until it was right above the Gigantes. The massive Golem was distracted by Ende's Dragoon and Lu's Waltraute, so it was completely oblivious to the duo above.

The sight before my eyes made me pause for a moment to think about the difference between Golems and robots. This Golem clearly had the capacity to be distracted, which made me think it had some kind of human trait to it. Golems weren't merely robots, after all. They all had some element of personality to them, and legacy Golems usually had more personality than most.

In the Hecatoncheir's case, the old witch-king overrode any hint of personality, but it felt to me like the Gigantes had a sense of self that

operated alongside its programmed orders. Though obviously, that didn't mean we could negotiate with it. We were already in the middle of battle, so I saw no reason to stop.

Linne took advantage of its distracted state, leaping Gerhilde off Helmwig's back and hurtling down toward the Gollem below.

"Meteor Kiiiiiiiiiiick!"

Gerhilde, its entire frame made intensely heavy thanks to **[Gravity]**, landed a direct hit on the top of the Gigantes's head from above. Moments later, a dull metallic clunk rang out, and its entire head caved inward and smashed into its torso.

Gerhilde's base weight was around seven tons, so I couldn't even begin to imagine how heavy it had been after being amplified. This wasn't just something falling out of the sky and conking a person on the head, it was more like a lead golf ball falling from a skyscraper directly onto someone's skull.

The Gigantes, understandably, couldn't recover from that. It stopped moving entirely, lurched forward onto its knees, and eventually fell flat.

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"...Did they defeat it?"

The people watching on the monitors in Agarthia were stunned beyond belief. The Gollem had fallen so unceremoniously that they'd barely had any time to register what had happened.

"I'm not surprised my Frame Gear and one of our daughters could pull that off. It was a fine finisher, to be sure. Still, it's not over yet..."

"Mhm. There's more to come, I think."

Elze and Sue calmly watched the situation unfold on the monitor, their comments prompting everyone else to cautiously look back at the biggest machine on the screen.

A low rumbling and a mechanical roar creaked out from the Gigantes, its prone body spewing puffs of magical vapor.

“Auuugh! They totally scrapped it! I told them to be gentle!” Quun yelled, losing her cool. She seemed genuinely distressed as she looked at the Gollem’s caved-in head.

Frei and Yakumo silently shook their heads at her and turned back to watch the screen. The monitor only showed more billowing vapor rising from the Gigantes. And then...with a dull clunk...the Gigantes’s right arm fell off at the shoulder. Another clunk rang out a second later, and the arm broke off at the elbow. Magical vapor filled the camera feed, obscuring what was happening. Only clunking sounds rang out across the battlefield.

When the smoke eventually cleared, the Gigantes’s body was broken into several pieces. The left and right arms had come off and broken apart at the elbows, producing four pieces in total. The left and right legs had also come off and broken apart at the knees, producing another four pieces. Then there was the head, the upper torso, and the lower belly.

The Gigantes had broken into eleven distinct parts...but not as a result of Gerhilde’s attack.

“A-Ah! Look!” one of the people watching on the monitor yelled, finding themselves unable to hold their voice back any longer.

One of the separated chunks of the Gigantes slowly began to shift and reassemble...and it eventually took the form of a smaller humanoid Gollem that was roughly the same size as a Frame Gear. The other parts followed suit, and all eleven parts transformed... The head part didn’t finish its transformation, however, meaning ten smaller Gollems remained.

“Hm... The Gigantes was structured similarly to my Ortlinde, was it?”

“My goodness! Merging and separation functions?! That’s incredible!”

Sue could only sigh as she realized what the Gigantes was truly capable of. Quun, on the other hand, looked more excited than ever. Frei and Yakumo once again shook their heads in disapproval before turning back to the monitor to see what would come next.

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The Gigantes had split its body apart and separated into different Gollems. Its head wasn’t functioning properly, so it ended up becoming ten Gollems in total. One from the upper torso, one from the belly, two from the upper arms, two from the forearms, two from the upper legs, and two from the shins downward.

I never expected it to be a segmented Gollem. Honestly, it was remarkably similar to the Ortlinde Overlord.

Just because it split didn’t mean things were easier either. Each individual piece was still larger than the average Frame Gear. They were all at least the size of the Ortlinde Overlord. The two torso pieces were the biggest by far, though. Not necessarily in height, but certainly in width. If each of them had their own Q-Crystals and individual power sources, then it stood to reason that the head was the one that kept them cohesive. Once the head had been crushed, the Gollem split apart because it wasn’t able to remain synchronized.

“There are ten of them...and ten of us. This seems perfect to me, it does,” Yae said, her cheerful voice flowing through the speakers.

Huh? Does she want us to each take one?

“I’ll take the biggest one then, okay?!” Allis exclaimed, her voice ringing out over the speakers as she made the Ortlinde Overlord’s knuckles smack together.

The biggest Golem was probably the upper-torso one, but that was also the one that had deflected her Cannon Knuckle attack earlier. I wondered if she'd be okay. Though that said, it was probably best for us to have our biggest Frame Gear take on their biggest Golem. Ortlinde didn't just have the Cannon Knuckle at its disposal, after all.

"It'd be wisest to take out the weakest one as a group first. After that, we should each split into teams and take them on one at a time."

Yumina was right. It seemed far more advantageous to whittle down their numbers. Sure, in battle manga it was more flashy or cinematic to do one-on-one battles, but when it came to actual combat, it was always better to gang up on your foes and take them down one at a time. The opponent might have been thinking of that too, though, which was why you had to identify the weakest link as soon as possible. And as far as the weakest went, those would probably be the Golems that formed from the Gigantes's upper legs. They looked the frailest by far.

The Gigantes didn't have very long legs, but since they had to support the body, they were still probably pretty thick.

"Let's get ahead of this while we can," Yumina stated. She then trained her sniper rifle on one of the upper-leg Golems.

"We should attack them from beyond their active range. That's the best way to ensure our victory," Leen said, her transmission punctuated by the shoulders, legs, and chest armor on Grimgerde sliding open, revealing multiple missile pods. Grimgerde's arm Gatling guns and finger vulcan cannons primed themselves and aimed at the same Golem as Yumina.

"Let's settle this!"

Lu's Waltraute suddenly transitioned into caster mode, the large cannon on its back tracking the same Golem as the other two.

“Fire!”

A massive hail of bullets rained down on the enemy Gollem, riddling the machine with holes. The armor on the legs clearly wasn't as sturdy as the plating on the chest, since it blew open and fell backward after the volley.

The other nine Gollems began to move immediately. They split into two groups, one in a defensive formation and another in a counterattack formation. The two upper-arm Gollems had long-range capabilities, so they unleashed the Gigantes's shoulder missiles.

Yumina and the others promptly spread outward and avoided the missile shower.

The upper-leg Gollem that had been attacked recovered and stood up, but it was missing most of its armor plating. Smoke billowed from its body. I could hardly believe it had taken such heavy fire and come out unscathed. Talk about tenacious...

“Cannon Knuckle!”

A moment later, out of nowhere, the Gollem was suddenly smashed into smithereens by Allis's well-timed rocket punch. It was so thoroughly pulverized that there was no hope for it to regenerate, which meant there were only nine left.

“Let's go after the other one.”

On Yumina's command, the long-range trio focused their attacks on the other upper-leg Gollem. Much like the first one, it was blasted until it was smoldering...leaving the perfect opening for Linze to swoop in with Helmwig for the coup de grâce. Her Frame Gear's crystal wings easily sliced through the dazed Gollem, bisecting it cleanly.

Two down, eight to go.

The upper-arm Golems began firing on Helmwige as it circled them in the sky. She deftly dodged every attack with ease, swerving and sliding past every missile and bullet launched upward.

When'd you get so good at maneuvering like that? You're like an ace pilot...

During our honeymoon, we'd ended up visiting a few arcades and I ended up being pretty surprised by how good Linze was at the shooting games. Actually, all my wives were surprisingly deft at stuff like that...

"Hilde-dono and I shall take out these attackers, we shall."

"That's right! We're perfect for the job!"

Yae's Schwertleite and Hilde's Siegrune closed in on the upper-arm Golems that were firing on Linze. The Golems had missile pods on their backs, Gatling guns at their sides, and shields on their shoulders. They were clearly long-range attackers. That said, they did have spears for close encounters as well. However, even with those spears, Yae and Hilde had the clear advantage if they could push them into a melee fight. Normally, it would have been impossible to make it through the hail of bullets, but Yae and Hilde were powerful and agile enough to knock bullets out of thin air.

"What are the two forearm Golems like?"

"They seem slow, but also quite tough."

Yumina asked for a status report, and Sakura quickly replied. The two Golems were definitely on the stocky and heavily armored side.

"I'll handle them! I'll use Mama Elze's pile bunkers to break them to bits! Can I, mom?!"

"Sure, you can... Could you offer her some support, Sakura?"

"Mhm. Got it. I'll help Linne out...and make sure she stays safe."

Apparently, Sakura's Rossweisse and Linne's Gerhilde were the ones selected to face down the forearm Gollems. Rossweisse's soundwave magic could probably make that thick armor more brittle.

The sight of Linne charging forward must've sparked Allis's competitive streak, as she quickly pointed Ortlinde's finger over towards the upper-torso Gollem.

"I'm gonna trash the big one now!"

"Sure. Ende can take on the second-biggest Gollem."

"Huh?! Touya! You can't just decide stuff like that!"

Ende started complaining over the speakers, but I just mentally tuned him out. I knew he was capable of resonance stuff similar to Rossweisse, so it only made sense to assign him to a heavily armored target.

"Hey, Allis, you wanna see your dad beat a bad guy, right?"

"Yeah! I'd love to see him do it!"

"W-Wait, she would? You would?! H-Ha ha... Th-Then yeah, I'll do it, Allis! For you!"

Pfft! You're dancing in the palm of her hand, Ende. You're one useless man, you know that? Powerless in the face of your daughter... I'm in the same boat, though...so it's not like I can talk.

With those targets decided, that left Yumina, Linze, Lu, and Leen to face the lower-leg Gollems. Those Gollems seemed to be designed for hand-to-hand combat, with bladed weapons jutting from their arms. It wasn't that they were wielding swords, it was more that their hands were the swords. They weren't quite as large as the other ones, but they still stood taller than regular Frame Gears.

Even though it was two against four in this case, most of the remaining girls were long-range attackers. The key to winning this fight would be for the girls to maintain their distance.

“Let’s do this!” Linne exclaimed as she took Gerhilde and had it charge toward one of the forearm Gollems. Sakura’s Rossweisse began to transmit her singing voice in tandem with the strike.

...Why this song, of all things?

From what I understood, it was a famous American rock song. The lyrics were apparently about the lead singer finding the girl he had a crush on in high school on the pinup page of an adult magazine.

Sakura’s wedding ring was imbued with all kinds of divinity, so she should’ve been able to understand the English lyrics...

The resonance pulse emitted from Rossweisse rocketed against the forearm Golem, shattering its armor in an instant.

“Let’s go! Pile bunker!” Linne roared, smashing Gerhilde’s fist hard into the exposed innards of her Golem foe. The pile bunker hissed as it shot forward, penetrating the shattered armor and stabbing through the Golem.

“One more!”

Gerhilde’s left fist raged forward. A loud bang rang out as the next pile bunker drove forward, smashing up the circuitry inside the Golem. The Golem shuddered and trembled, convulsing in a spastic fit as it fell forward. And with that, it powered down.

Wow, she killed it with one blow. Oh, wait, I guess it was two.

“Now, onto the next one!”

Gerhilde turned to face the next forearm Golem, but it suddenly fired the Gigantes hand on its back toward her like a rocket.

“What?!”

Linne hurriedly tried to dodge the incoming strike, but she wasn’t quite fast enough. And so, the hand managed to grab Gerhilde.

Oh crap! Should I interfere?!

Right as I was thinking that, four dagger-shaped Fragarachs shot out from Rossweisse, aiming at the thumb of the giant hand that held Linne in its grasp. Linne took that opportunity to wriggle free, putting some distance between herself and her foe.

“That was scary!”

“You let your guard down because the first enemy was weak... Always be alert, okay?”

“Okaaay...” Linne mumbled, her voice sounding a little dejected as Sakura told her off. I couldn’t blame her for being rash, though, since she’d so expertly dispatched the first enemy. She probably thought she had a good thing going.

I looked over and saw Allis in the Ortlinde, struggling against the chest Gollem. They’d locked hands and were pushing against each other, vying for supremacy in a contest of physical might.

“Haaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!”

Ortlinde’s raw power output was higher than even Reginleif. It was the single strongest Frame Gear we had. The boosters on its back roared as Ortlinde gained ground, pushing the enemy backward. However, right when the chest Gollem looked about ready to crumble, a vulcan cannon popped out by the side of its head and aimed directly at Ortlinde’s face.

“I don’t think so!” Allis roared, leaning Ortlinde back slightly and smashing it forward in one heavy motion. She actually had her Frame Gear headbutt the Gollem, knocking it on its back.

Wow... It’s like pro wrestling...

The toppled Gollem quickly rose to its feet once more, bringing its fist smashing toward Ortlinde. Allis blocked the attack with Ortlinde’s left arm, bringing her right fist up in a counter.

Unfortunately, the impact barely did anything at all... It was just as I'd thought, that Gollem had the thickest armor of them all. The headbutt from earlier had simply knocked it off balance, rather than actually damaging it. It had a kind of inverted triangle shape, so it wasn't too hard to topple.

The Gollem seemed completely sure of its defenses, enough to abandon any attempt at self-preservation. It pushed the offensive against Ortlinde, forcing Allis to shield herself.

"Dang it!"

The drill bit attached to Ortlinde's leg separated and fit itself onto the Frame Gear's right arm. That arm then swung forward, getting through one of the gaps the Gollem left during its flurry, the drill's tip pressed against the Gollem's rubbery armor. And yet, it still wasn't enough to penetrate the plating. The most it had done was dig a little dent into the supple surface.

"I've got you right where I want you!" Allis shouted. A second later, the drill began to rapidly spin. Bit by bit, the drill bit began boring through the rubbery armor.

"Prisma Rose!"

Crystal vines began digging into the Gollem's armor, cracking it apart. The vines seemed to snake outward from the Gollem's insides, fixing it to the floor. After a few brief moments, it powered down.

Apparently, Allis had triggered her prisma rose on the tip of the drill, allowing it to enter the Gollem and destroy it from the inside. As a result, a haphazard mess of vines and thorns protruded from the chest Gollem's armor. It had been thoroughly annihilated.

Unfortunately, that told me the insides were probably completely wrecked... I had a feeling Quun was probably screaming at the monitor...

“I did it, dad!” Allis cheered as she looked out toward her father, who was locked in battle with the Gollem that had previously been part of the Gigantes’s belly. It was a thick Gollem with short, stubby legs that had two arms with Gatling guns attached to its sides.

Ende’s Dragoon easily dodged the bullets it was firing, however. In terms of raw speed, it simply couldn’t match up to what Ende brought to the table.

“Looks like Allis is done, so I’ll wrap things up here too.”

The Dragoon pulled two short crystal swords out from its waist, brandishing them. The high-speed rollers then went into full acceleration mode, sending the Frame Gear rocketing forward. Ende masterfully sliced off one of the Gollem’s arms as it charged by, before promptly doubling back around and catching the other. Then, in one final motion, the Dragoon turned and sped forward once more. It held both blades out as it moved, letting the speed do all the work. The Gollem was bisected before it had time to process what was going on.

“That’s the end of that.”

Just to be sure of his victory, Ende brought both blades slashing through the Gollem’s chest. It fell to the ground, glimmering smoke pluming upward from its destroyed frame.

The fight had ended so quickly that it almost seemed unfair. But in terms of raw matchup...Ende probably would’ve done that to any of the Gollems here.

“Not bad, right, Allis? Your old man’s pretty cool when he tries, isn’t he?!” Ende said as he turned around in an attempt to get his daughter’s attention... Unfortunately, she hadn’t even been watching him. The moment her battle had finished, Allis had left her father behind and went to join the other girls.

“Sh-She left?!”

...Damn. I feel your pain, man... You tried your best, but sometimes that's just not enough.

Ende sent his Dragoon running after Allis, ready to meet with Yumina and the others.

I glanced over and noticed that Linne had already taken down the second forearm Golem. At the same time, Yae and Hilde had also dispatched the upper-arm Golems without taking a scratch.

All that remained were the two lower-leg Golems that Yumina's group was facing. It was ten against two at this point, so our victory was all but assured. There was nothing I could imagine our enemies doing to win at this point.

I kind of felt bad, honestly. The fully combined Gigantes was clearly the full-power version of the ancient technology. Once we'd crushed the head, we'd basically divided its strength.

Linne's crushing attack had secured our victory at the very beginning, so this was basically just cleanup.

Linne really was the MVP here, huh...? Guess that's one of my daughters for you. I'm pretty impressed.

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"Goodness me... I expected a racket, but it turned out to be rather interesting, no?"

"That's one of the endweapons... Where was that thing resting, I wonder?"

Far out on the outskirts of Isenberg, two shadowy figures stood watching the battle from afar. One was a red-haired woman in a domino mask, the other a man in a diving suit. The woman held an orange mace in her hand, while the man carried a blue hatchet.

Tangerine and Indigo were their names. They'd come here after hearing a report from one of their Golems that had been stationed

in the area. Thanks to Indigo's weapon, Deep Blue, they'd been able to teleport a little bit away from the battlefield with relative ease.

When Touya had run his search spell to keep an eye out for evil-looking Golems, he'd made a critical error. The Golem working for the duo was a perfectly ordinary one. It wouldn't have aroused any suspicion at a glance, so it slipped by his spell.

"Those are the giant Golems of Brunhild... It's my first time seeing them, but I must say they're rather impressive. Scarlet's right, I think. Our creation won't be a match for them."

"Hah! Do you think we'll be able to achieve our goals with thoughts like that?" Tangerine said, sneering all the while. She was evidently irritated by Indigo's defeatist tone.

"I'm not worried, Tangerine. Scarlet will create a machine that far outclasses theirs. Just give it time. That's why we secured the Ark, after all. With Chrom Ranchesse's legacy on our side, how can we fail? We'll create a worthy vessel for our new god to descend upon this world."

"Hmph! You sound awfully confident. Is your piety so strong because you were a man of the cloth once, Indigo? Not that I care, mind you. So long as this world suffers in the process, I'll be happy," Tangerine said, shrugging casually as she spoke. She then hoisted her mace, Halloween, up against her shoulder. Though they called themselves the wicked devout, not all of them were especially pious. Some just wanted to watch the world burn.

"Either way, we can't just leave after seeing this. Let's bring a few gifts back for Scarlet to take a look at, all right?"

Though the diving helmet obscured it, Indigo flashed a sinister grin.

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"Cannon Knuckle!"

Allis used Ortlinde to defeat the last remaining Gollem. Defeat was an understatement, though... She blasted it to smithereens. I had a feeling Quun and Doc Babylon were already upset.

“We did it! They’re all down!”

I heard Linne celebrating from within Gerhilde.

All’s well that ends well, I suppose. Was a lot easier than I expected, even... Not that I can talk. I basically did nothing.

I quietly hoped the people watching on the monitor weren’t judging me for my inaction... I didn’t want to be perceived as some deadbeat husband who made his wives do all the work for him.

Ugh... Whatever. I’ll pick up the slack during cleanup duty.

I gathered up all the broken Gigantes pieces, but just as I was about to open my **[Storage]**, the ground began to rumble and bubble upward and the Gollem head and chest pieces were enveloped in blue bubbles... And then, they fell through the ground, leaving watery ripples in their wake as they vanished.

“What?!”

“Touya! Someone on the cliffside, three o’clock!”

Yumina’s voice made me turn Reginleif’s camera. I saw two shadowy figures on the nearby cliff, but they rippled away just as the Gollem pieces had. I could only make them out for a split second, but I distinctly saw a red-haired woman and someone wearing a diving suit. In other words...they were the wicked devout!

“Run search! Wicked devout! Now!”

“Searching... Search complete. No results found.”

Dammit... They’re blocking me off again!

I quickly ran a search for Gigantes parts, but nothing came up either.

Ugh... That can't be regular teleportation magic. Maybe they can transfer to another space or something...?

"Tch... They let us do the hard work, then made off with the spoils..."

It was the Ark all over again. I should've taken more care, especially considering the fact that I knew I was up against foes that had access to warping magic...

I quickly pushed the remaining Gigantes pieces into **[Storage]**, just in case they decided to come back for more. I wondered why they only took the head and chest parts... It was either that they couldn't take more, or they didn't need more. There was no way of knowing which was the correct answer, though.

I can't believe they did that... They're getting more brazen, that's for sure.

I sighed quietly, thinking about the situation from Reginleif's cockpit. My introspection was cut short by my phone, however.

Ugh, Quun... Right, she was watching the whole thing from the monitor. You can't blame me for this, though! How was I supposed to deal with the situation if I didn't even know it was gonna happen? Cut me some slack!

The ringtone kept on buzzing away at me, heralding the inevitable doom I'd suffer if I picked up. I gulped nervously before finally accepting the call.

Dammit...

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"Auuugh! How could you have been so reckless, father?! You've broken more than half of them beyond repair! What were you doing out there?!"

"I mean, technically, I wasn't doing anything at all... It's not my fault!"

“I don’t wanna hear your excuses!”

Quun was positively fuming. I could understand why, though. The Golem we’d fought was a priceless remnant from an ancient civilization. It was truly one of a kind...and we’d just about trashed it. The upper-leg portions were shredded, and the forearm Golems were covered in cracks thanks to Sakura’s symphonic horns. The pieces Ende and Hilde had fought were in better shape, but for the most part, everything was scrap metal. I mean, the stuff Ortlinde had hit with its cannon knuckle was basically dust...

The head Golem, which would’ve housed the main Q-Crystal that functioned as the Gigantes’s brain, had been stolen. The chest piece, which apparently housed the primary G-Cube power source, had been whisked away by the wicked devout as well.

You didn’t have to be Quun to be mad about the thievery. It was my own carelessness that got us into that mess. Still, I didn’t think it was my fault the Gigantes pieces got so badly roughed up. I didn’t even participate in the fight.

“Agh! Don’t you understand a thing?! That Gigantes was a priceless relic! We could’ve reconstructed it to fight for us using the power of Babylon! But even putting that aside, don’t you have a heart?! Think about the blood, sweat, and tears that must’ve gone into building that thing! Think about the poor ancient engineers! And now it’s junk! It’s glorified scrap!”

“Huh? Oh, uh, yeah. I get it. Sorry... Are you still mad?”

“Of course I’m mad! You’re not even listening!” Quun yelled, stomping her feet. She resembled her mother when she was angry... The sight made me a little nostalgic, even. It caused me to think back to when Leen threw tantrums like that.

I couldn’t help but smile, seeing how alike they were. She truly was her mother’s daughter.

“What’s the smirk for, father?! Is this funny to you?!”

“Oh, no... Sorry...”



My unconscious smirk provoked Quun into hurling a lightning bolt at me.

Whoops... I must've really ticked her off.

"Calm down, okay? It's not like you expected to recover it intact, right?"

"I suppose you're right, but still..."

Elze, who hadn't participated, came over to save my butt.

Finally... She's been lecturing me for like thirty minutes straight, you know? Couldn't you have saved me a little sooner?

"Well, it's fine. I'm sure we can still recover enough of the technology from the broken parts. Plus, it's better to lose the technology than have Gandhilis come under threat..."

"Thanks for understanding..."

King Gandhilis offered me some words of consolation. I wondered if Quun had intentionally reprimanded me so harshly so I wouldn't get in any political trouble.

"Augh! What a waste! This is a tragedy! It's awful!"

No, that's probably not why.

"At any rate, shall we get to dismantling the Gigantes here in Agarthia? My lab is most interested in analyzing it."

"Of course. I'd be happy to cooperate with you."

Doc Babylon quickly chimed in after I brought out the remaining Gigantes pieces. I had a feeling she'd already cast **[Analyze]** and gotten an understanding of it, though.

"By the way, I'm curious. What will we do with Agarthia itself?"

“Hmm... It falls within the confines of my nation, yet this place existed before Gandhilis was even conceived of... Under ordinary circumstances, we’d recognize the autonomy of the native inhabitants, but it would seem all of them are Gollems...”

Perlulushka and the other Gollems didn’t have designated contractors, since the people they had originally contracted with and served were long dead, and none of their descendants remained to take on the sub-master role in their programming. They were the only remnants of a long-dead civilization, and they had nobody to serve any longer. The typical protocol would have been to just reset them and have them assigned to new masters, but...

“Don’t be absurd! These are ancient legacy Gollems with memories of the past several thousand years! You can’t just reset them! The information they carry, as well as the things they’ve seen, are far too valuable!”

Elluka was vehemently against the idea of resetting them. There were a handful of Gollems that retained their memories through contracting. Albus, the white crown, and Blau, the blue crown, were among those that could still remember the distant past. But in general, it was considered highly abnormal for humanoid model Gollems to maintain their memories. They were far more fragile than some of the more heavy-duty Gollems, and they tended to be the kinds of Golem that were more regularly transferred from master to master.

Of course, whenever a Golem was transferred to someone who wasn’t blood-related to their previous master, they had to be fully reset in order to make the new contract. That was why there was so little living memory of the ancient civilizations among them.

Humanoid Gollems were built to live with people, which was precisely why Perlulushka and her kin were so valuable. They had intact memories of the culture, customs, and daily lives of the people

who lived all those years ago. It remained to be seen if the more generic Golems had those memories, but at the very least, Perlulushka did, so erasing those memories in the form of a factory reset would be tantamount to destroying precious historical records. That was why we couldn't have her contract with a new master. Frankly, it would have been historically and morally wrong to have her do it.

Perlulushka was a Golem, but she had a will of her own. I personally felt that leaving her to manage the underground facility was for the best. And so, I brought the idea up with King Gandhilis. He agreed and began drafting up a plan to have Agarthia be a checkpoint midway through the tunnel I'd built. Perlulushka lived to serve humanity, and as such, she had no objections to the proposal either.

Oh yeah, I was in the middle of digging that tunnel, wasn't I...? Finishing it off is gonna be a real pain in the ass.

"What, why us? We didn't sign up for that!"

"You didn't fight, Elze. Why not help now?"

"I can't use Earth magic, remember? If it's digging you want, just make Ende do it. That'd be way faster."

"Huh?! What do I have to do with this?!" Ende asked, jumping up in a panic after Elze volunteered him.

Quun was too busy looking over the Gigantes pieces to help, while Leen was tired from the battle. Thus, I could only count on Ende.

"Man, gimme a break! You guys have been using me like a workhorse lately!" Ende grumbled. However, I didn't understand what he was complaining about. If he didn't want to be a workhorse, why did he let us treat him like one?

"C'mon, let's go! I'll flatten things out, then you can do the digging."

I buffed myself with [**Power Rise**] and grabbed Ende by the scruff of the neck, carting him away. I just wanted to get this over with.

“Ah! T-Touya?! A-Allis! Help me!”

“Good luck, dad! Do it for me!”

“A-Aaaugh! O-Okay! Your dad’s gonna give it his best!”

Whew. Good thing Allis has him whipped.



Chapter IV: The Prince Returns

Meanwhile, there was an issue in Gallaria, heart of the Regulus Empire...

"I'm out of funds..." a young boy said, sighing quietly as he sat on a bench near the fountain in the capital's central park.

"No cash, kiddo? The people of this era are driven by money too, huh...?" a small voice leaked out from the blade that was propped nearby. Nobody else was around, so only Kuon could hear it.

"Is it really that expensive for you to get a ride home, though, kiddo?"

"Nah, it's not that it's especially pricey. I can definitely afford to ride home..."

"So what's the problem?"

"I don't have enough money to buy souvenirs..."

The six-year-old prince let out a sigh. All he could do was shake his head. The look of bitter resignation on his face was palpable. It certainly wasn't an expression one would expect a boy his age to adopt.

"S-Souvenirs? Who cares if ya get those?"

"My sisters. My father and mothers won't care, but they'll all complain if I don't bring them something. I can't go back without bringing them something."

The boy had eight sisters. Elna was polite and graceful, so she certainly wouldn't complain, but the same couldn't be said for the rest. Even Steph, the littlest of all his siblings, would kick up a fuss if he showed up empty-handed.

He had no option in this case. But if he bought souvenirs for everyone, he'd be short of money for the ride home. And if he bought a ticket home, he'd be short of money for all the souvenirs. He could always buy something cheap or tacky, but he knew they wouldn't appreciate that.

"I don't have anything to trade either..."

"...What're ya eyeing me up like that for, kiddo? Ain't gonna sell me, right?"

Kuon had no intention of selling Silver. Sure, the sword was a rare and valuable piece of legacy tech that'd fetch a pretty penny on the eastern continent, but if Quun learned about it, Kuon would never hear the end of it.

The emperor of Regulus was technically Kuon's grandfather, and he was the biological grandfather of Kuon's sister Arcia. Unfortunately, there was no way he could just stroll up to the castle and go, "Hey, I'm your grandson. Could I have some money?"

"I doubt he'd even believe me if I told him."

The emperor had actually already been informed about the situation by Touya, but Kuon had no way of knowing that. Sadly, he'd have to live in ignorance of the simple solution that was nearby.

"In the worst-case scenario, I could just buy some souvenirs, then make it to Brunhild on foot...or maybe I could hunt some beasts for extra cash? Augh, I should've earned some money at that elf village," Kuon mumbled, then folded his arms and let out a deep sigh when suddenly Silver spoke in a hushed voice.

"Kiddo... Eyes up. Look there. What's going on?"

"Hm?"

Kuon looked up and saw a crowd gathered at the nearby fountain. Two men stood there, yelling to draw in more onlookers.

“Come one, come all! Behold the mechanical marvel from the western continent! A Golem! Gaze upon this fine machine slave! It is a fine replacement for any human worker!”

“That’s right! And this machine’s special! It’s known as a legacy Golem! It’s an ancient remnant of a bygone civilization! One with a stupendous power! You’ll never find anything like this at such a low price ever again! Come one, come all!”

Kuon tottered over to see what the two men were yelling about. One of the men was big and broad, his bald head glimmering in the sunlight. The other man was small and thin, with a hooked nose and sharp eyes. Behind them stood a black iron Golem, a price tag neatly affixed to its neck.

It was about four meters tall, with a bulky torso and a small head. Its arms and legs were thick as well. At a glance, one experienced with Golems would assume it to be a power-type, meant for heavy lifting.

“Can it move? Let’s see it!”

“But of course, sir! Say hello to everyone, Golem!”

At the hook-nosed man’s command, the black Golem raised its arms high in a sweeping wave. The crowd let out a delighted cheer.

A short, chubby merchant came waddling out of the crowd. He approached the thin salesman.

“Hm... How much can this thing carry?”

“It can haul an entire carriage of merchandise, my good friend! You could use it as an escort on long treks, or even use it to carry your cargo itself! At this price, it’s practically a steal!”

The portly merchant pondered for a few moments before finally pulling out a purse from his pocket.

“Very well, I’ll take it...”

“I don’t think you should, mister,” a voice suddenly called out from the crowd, prompting the merchant to turn around. It was a boy, about five or six years old. He had beautiful golden hair that flowed past his shoulders. He held a sheathed shortsword in his hands.

The merchant couldn’t quite place why, but something about this boy felt different, as if he were no normal child at all. The fact that the boy had advised him against the purchase rang clear in the back of his mind. The merchant’s beloved elder brother had once told him to always trust his gut. In keeping with that mantra, the merchant walked toward the blond-haired child.

“Whyever not? It seems to be a good price, no?”

“It would be, if it was a real legacy Gollem. But this is a fake.”

“You little brat! Don’t go lying about my business! Who do you think you are?! Scram!”

The bulky, bald merchant came stomping towards Kuon. But the boy was too fast. He ducked beneath the man’s lumbering hands, jumped into the air, and briefly hovered above the black iron Gollem. He then gently swung the sheathed blade in his hands down in an arc, thudding it against the Gollem’s head. A dull crack rang out across the area.

“Hear that? It’s hollow, isn’t it? There should be a Q-Crystal inside. It’s the Gollem’s brain, but this one’s empty.”

Silver quietly mumbled something about not wanting to be used as a blunt instrument, but Kuon elected to ignore him.

“Q-what? Don’t talk nonsense, kid! Hey, get him!”

The skinny man ordered the Gollem to apprehend Kuon, and the bulky machine reached to grab the boy by the shoulders.

Kuon ducked once again, unsheathed Silver as he spun around, and slashed at the black iron armor on the Gollem’s chest. The Gollem’s

outer plating was shredded away in seconds, exposing the innards...revealing the nervous-looking man cramped inside the Gollem's chest piece, manipulating different buttons and gear sticks.

"I knew it. It's a Dvergr, not a Gollem."

Dvergrs were engineering machines widely distributed by the Strand Company. Unlike Gollems, they weren't autonomous and could only work with human intervention. They weren't widely known among the public, but many countries employed them in civil engineering projects.

Dvergrs were fairly expensive, but nowhere near the kind of price one might end up paying for a legacy Gollem. That meant the two men...three if you counted the guy in the Dvergr, were trying to scam their way into a tidy sum of money.

Kuon wondered how the small man inside the Dvergr intended to escape after being sold, but quickly figured he'd probably eject himself in the middle of the night and run away.

"Tsk! You little brat! Who do you think you are?!"

The bald man ran up toward Kuon and attempted to kick him, but the boy nimbly leaped through the gap between his legs and struck him hard on the lower back.

"[Paralyze]."

"Gwegh?!"

The man crumpled on the spot, sounding a bit like a deflating frog.

In the same motion, Kuon danced gracefully past the Dvergr and severed its arms and legs using Silver's blade.

"Bwah?!"

The machinery fell forward, preventing the man inside from escaping.

“Ugh!”

“Grab him!”

“Eek!”

The hook-nosed man had attempted to escape, but the crowd quickly seized him and threw him to the ground. Kuon was just about to use one of his mystic eyes to fix the man in place, but he stopped himself after realizing the situation was under control.

“Hey, call the guards!”

“Get some rope to tie these bastards up! Don’t forget the one under that hunk of junk!”

The onlookers were quick to act, almost eager to apprehend the men. They had no idea Kuon could’ve easily taken the scammers into custody, but the boy didn’t mind. He’d let the mob handle it. He didn’t exactly care if criminals got a little roughed up, after all.

“Ah, young man! Thank you! Those charlatans almost had me fooled, they did.”

The merchant bowed his head to Kuon. Had the boy not spoken up when he had, then he’d have been tricked into buying a useless product. The merchant had been so enamored by the exotic sight that he’d allowed it to sway his sense of reason. He knew that his elder brother would’ve taken some level of levity in the mistake, had he learned of it.

“In this era, Dvergrs and Golems aren’t common on the eastern continent. I can’t blame you for falling for it, sir.”

“This era?”

“Oh, don’t worry about it. Slip of the tongue.”

Golems and Dvergrs were only just starting to emerge in the eastern market, but most people only knew of them in stories and whispers

at this point in time. Certain discerning merchants had already made trips to the western continents to see the kinds of different wares over there, but that was a luxury afforded to few. It wouldn't be so easy for common folk to buy such advanced machines.

"I'd like to pay you back for your help, if I could... Where are your parents?"

"Oh...I'm traveling alone. My parents aren't with me..."

"Alone?! Goodness me..."

The man seemed shocked. Could this little boy really be all on his own? Sure, he was carrying a sword, but was that really enough? He'd shown some level of skill at fighting, but he was still just a boy of only five or six years.

"Do you have anywhere to go? I'm on my way to the Roadmare Union, if you'd like a ride."

"Ah... I appreciate the offer, but I actually need to go the opposite way. I'm on the way to Brunhild."

That was unfortunate. Had the merchant been going the same way, Kuon would've happily gone with him. That way he would've been able to buy all the souvenirs while also securing himself a ride home.

"Oh! Brunhild, you say! What a funny coincidence! My brother owns a store there, you know?! He's in this very capital, and he'll be heading back to Brunhild in only a few days. If you'd like to meet him, I could arrange for you to travel back with him."

"Really?! That would be amazing!"

Kuon happily accepted the offer. Immense relief washed over him as he realized he could secure the souvenirs. Now he didn't have to deal with his sisters and their scathing comments. The day had been saved.

The merchant suddenly started waving at someone behind Kuon, prompting the boy to turn around and look.

“Brother! Over here!”

“It’s been too long, Barac. Hm? Who is this boy?”

“Oh, I’m... Wait... Huh?!”

Kuon blinked in surprise. He knew this man. The face was somewhat younger than the one he knew, yet he knew him all the same. It was Brunhild’s royal clothier, Zanak Zenfield...

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With the tunnel in Gandhilis finally built, we returned to Brunhild. Quun, Elluka, Doc Babylon, and the professor elected to stay behind in Agartha to analyze the Gigantes, however. Some Gollem engineers from Gandhilis also came to the underground settlement to study the Gollem as well, but they lost their minds when they saw not one, but two of the five great gollemancers.

“Yeesh, that was a lot...”

“Good work today.”

I slumped back onto the couch as Yumina began brewing a pot of tea.

The kids, apparently excited after seeing the Gigantes battle, went off to the game room to play against each other in the simulators. Elze, Hilde, and Yae went with them. Ende, not wanting to let Allis out of his sight, tagged along as well.

“My, I’ve been away for a little while...but it is pleasant to see the children getting on so well here,” Granny Tokie said, sitting on the couch by my side, smiling gently as she sipped at the tea Yumina had served. She’d been in the divine realm for quite some time, so I was a little bit concerned that something had happened. Apparently, she was fine, however.

“We’ve still got two to go, though. Yumina’s child...and Sue’s too... They’ll all get to go back to the future when they’re together, right?”

“Well, that is a matter I’ve been meaning to discuss with you... There is a small issue,” Tokie replied, smiling coyly as she set down her teacup on the table.

...An issue? What kinda issue?

“Oh, fret not. I can easily return them to the future at any time. They will be able to rejoin their proper timestream without any hitches. However, there are a few circumstances that will require them to stay here just a little bit longer...”

“Like what?”

“I am dreadfully sorry, young Touya, but I cannot tell you just yet. Once I’ve finished my investigation, I will be sure to let you know. I promise.”

Granny Tokie took another sip from her teacup. Her expression seemed a little muddled. I had a feeling that it wasn’t a good sign either... Maybe something bad was due to happen, something to do with the wicked devout?

That lurch in my stomach suddenly went away as I felt my phone vibrate.

“Huh? It’s Zanak. Wonder what he wants.”

Zanak was the owner of the international clothing brand, Fashion King Zanak. He’d made a name for himself all over the world as a wedding dress designer and a purveyor of fine style. From what I’d heard, his dresses were selling incredibly well in just about every country on the continent. I’d been so busy after my own wedding that I hadn’t had any time to touch base with him, so I wondered what he was calling for.

“Er, hello?”

“Oh, hello there! Is this the grand duke? Er, ah... Hold on, sorry? Hm? You want me to put you on the call? Er, but... Erm... Okay, but please be polite. He’s a royal, you know? Er, sorry, Grand Duke. I’ll put the boy on the phone.”

Apparently, he was handing me off to someone else. I could only wonder who.

“Hello there. I’m calling, er...on behalf of Mochizuki Kuon. Do you understand?”

“What?!”

The new voice on the phone was that of a child, or, well, a little boy. A little boy who had just said Mochizuki Kuon.

“Er, can you hear me?”

“Y-Yeah! I can! A-Are you him?! Kuon?!”

“I am, yes. I absolutely am. I’m in Regulus. I was lucky enough to meet with Mr. Zenfield. I would’ve called sooner, but...I lost my phone.”

...So this is Kuon. Is he really a child? He’s speaking so politely.

My mind had only just started to process the fact that I was talking to my son, but all of a sudden, Yumina lashed her hand out and swiped the phone from me.

“H-Hello?! Kuon?! Is that you, Kuon?! I-It’s your mother! Do you understand?!”

Hey...Yumina, that’s rude. I was talking to him...

I tried to get my phone back from Yumina, but she expertly blocked every attempt. It was like we were playing basketball or something.

“Mhm. Okay. Got it. Stay right there, okay?! Don’t you move!”

Yumina exclaimed, ending the call without another word.

Wait, why’d you hang up?!

“Touya! We’re going to Regulus! He’s in Gallaria, in front of the central district carriage station! Let’s go!”

“Huh? Oh, sure... Yeah, that makes sense...”

I didn’t have to worry about the call, since I could just go talk to him in person. Now that I knew where he was, it was just a matter of warping to him.

I glanced over to Granny Tokie, who gave me a little nod.

All right, time to go pick up my boy!

“**[Gate].**”

The very second the portal opened, Yumina barreled through it headfirst.

S-Slow down, Yumina... Isn’t that a bit much?

I told my remaining wives in the room to sit tight, and then I went through the portal. I’d opened the other side of the portal to a back alley, since I didn’t want to just step out of thin air in the middle of a busy street. By the time I went through, however, Yumina was already running towards the main station area. I chased after her, breaking into a brisk jog. I saw a bunch of lined-up carriages by the side of the road...and then I saw Yumina hugging a six-year-old boy as tightly as she could.

Zanac stood nearby, a very confused expression on his face. Next to him stood what I could only assume to be some kind of merchant who vaguely resembled Zanac.

“Oh, Grand Duke. There you are. Is this boy really a distant relative of yours?”

“Errr... Yup. That’s what he is.”

I gave Zanak a lukewarm answer before turning back to Yumina. The boy in her grip was completely flustered, his eyes darting all over the place. He was tapping on her back as if to beg for mercy.



“Hey, Yumina! Let go of him, will you? Poor kid’s tapping out!”

“Huh?! O-Oh, I’m sorry!”

Freed from Yumina’s grasp, Kuon began to wheeze for breath.

...Just how tight was that hug?

He looked short for his age, despite only being six. His physique was slender. I’d even go so far as to call him delicate-looking. He had the same golden hair as Yumina, but he didn’t look particularly girly.

Kuon looked over at me. His eyes were black, just like mine.

“...Can we talk once we get back to Brunhild? This is a little public.”

“Y-Yeah. Sure, no problem. Gotcha.”

I thanked Zanak for finding Kuon, and he took the opportunity to introduce his brother, Barac. They certainly looked alike. Apparently, he was the branch manager of the Fashion King Zanak chain in Regulus. I didn’t even know Zanak had any siblings. I turned to the new face, thanking him as well. He told me I had nothing to thank him for, and that Kuon had actually saved him from a scammer.

Wow... He’s already doing wild stuff, I see...

“Hey, Zanak. You want a ride back to Brunhild? I can send you over.”

“No, that won’t be necessary. I have a few stops left to make in Regulus.”

Zanak politely declined my offer. I couldn’t blame him, especially not if it was work-related. On the eastern continent, horse-drawn carriages were still the primary mode of transportation. Things would probably be easier for Zanak once the magic train between Regulus and Brunhild was ready to go.

“Touya, let’s go!” Yumina yelled over to me, her hand already tightly wrapped around Kuon’s wrist. I couldn’t help but notice the shortsword in Kuon’s free hand.

Huh...? He wields a sword, then?

I thanked Zanak and his brother once more, then we promptly returned to Brunhild.

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“I’d like to formally introduce myself. I’m Mochizuki Kuon, Kuon being my given name. This is the first time we’ll have ever met during this time period, so I understand the awkwardness of the situation. It’s a pleasure to make your acquaintance, mother and father.”

“Oh, uh, right...”

“Aren’t you being a touch stiff? We’re your parents...”

Even Yumina found herself blinking in surprise at how formal Kuon was being. He seemed like a pretty serious kid.

“Oh, I didn’t read it as stiff. This is my usual demeanor, so don’t worry. I’m quite a carefree person, I promise.”

I didn’t quite believe him. The boy in front of me had the air of a formal businessman. I’d kind of thought that my son would be a little more casual, in all honesty.

Kuon was sitting on the couch in our living room. He turned to the side and reached into his backpack, producing a small wrapped box from within. He then set it out on the table, gesturing toward us both.

Hm? What’s this?

“Souvenirs, father. Mr. Zenfield’s brother suggested a good bakery. They’re cookies. I hope you find them to your liking.”

“H-Hey, are you really six?!”

You even got a gift for us?! You're attentive to the max! What kind of son are you?!

"Whoa... He's a polite kid, isn't he?"

"Is he really younger than my Linne? I can't believe it..."

Elze and Linze were exasperated as well.

Yumina must've heard them, since she was grinning from ear to ear.

I know you're proud, but isn't that smile a little too wide?

We heard the basic story of where Kuon had landed, how he'd gotten to us, and how he'd lost his phone. Wherever it was, we wouldn't find it in any conventional way. There was no recovering it from Elfrau's snowy wastes.

"Guess I'll just have to use the **[Apport]** and **[Teleport]** function to summon it back with its serial number..."

I pulled out my own phone and began looking through my list of contacts.

*...Wait. Oh crap. Kuon's serial number isn't in here! Duh! I haven't made his phone yet! Ugh... Guess I'll have to go look for it the hard way. Wait, no. I can just go over to the general area and use **[Search]**.*

"Touya?"

"No worries. I'll just head over to Elfrau and grab Kuon's phone."

"Apologies for the trouble, father," Kuon said, bowing his head before me.

Hmm... Are you really my kid? You're so formal... Honestly, he feels kind of distant. It's a little weird.

Yumina was right, he could afford to relax a little. Still, if this was his personality, I didn't have to take it personally. He was still my son, no matter how he talked.

I asked Kuon to point out where he'd lost his phone, then warped away to Elfrau.

"Ack! Cold!"

I found myself chilled to the bone the moment I teleported through. I definitely needed to find that phone fast.

Let's see here... Damn, it's a little far from here...

I used [**Fly**] to head over to the general area, then melted the snow and recovered Kuon's phone. I melted a ton of snow, so I ended up getting wet. Thankfully, the [**Protection**] enchantment protected the phone itself.

"All right, all done here. Time to head back."

I warped back to the living room and saw that my other children were already crowding around their brother.

"Kuon! You're late! Where were you?!"

"Lots of stuff happened... Oh yeah, Linne. Here, have some treats from Regulus."

"Oh! Wow! That looks yummy!"

"Kuon, did you get in trouble again? I keep telling you you've gotta be more careful..."

"No, I just happened to get involved with a few things... It's fine... Oh, by the way, Frei...I got this unusual knife for you while I was in Regulus."

"...Oho. What a strange curve that blade has, even by Regulus standards. Hmm... I've never seen one quite like this. He he he... Thanks a bunch."

Kuon handed off souvenirs to his sisters, one after the other. He did it so casually that it seemed like he knew exactly what buttons to press to get the reactions he wanted.

“Kuon! Kuon! What’d you get me?! Huh? Huh?”

Allis couldn’t help but yell out in excitement as she clung to Kuon’s side on the couch. She wasn’t exactly trying to hide her affection.

Someone suddenly tapped me on the shoulder. I turned and saw Ende. He was smiling, but his eyes looked dead.

“Touya... Don’t you think your son’s just a teensy tiny bit too close to my daughter?”

Huh? Looks like the other way around to me... You’re letting yourself be blinded, man.

“I don’t see Steph or Quun... Are they not here yet?”

“Steph hasn’t come to Brunhild yet, but Quun’s here. She’s just busy in Gandhilis right now. She should be back before dinner, however,” Arcia answered Kuon’s question.

Yakumo said she’d go and pick up Quun later on, so we had that sorted. In the meantime, I figured my technically-inclined daughter would be busy poring over the Golem remains.

Kuon sighed quietly as he heard the news, gripping a small sword by his side as he said, “What a shame. I had the perfect souvenir for Quun too.”

“Hwah?! Souvenir?! Ya don’t mean me, do ya kiddo?!”

Huh?! What was that voice?! Was it the sword?!

Everyone stared in disbelief as the sword, still in its scabbard, floated up into midair.

“Ack! Sorry fer the late introduction! Name’s Silver! I’m a humble blade! I might not be a formal type, an’ my edges are a little rough, but it’s nice ta meet you ladies!”

The sword wiggled its pommel slightly in a nodding gesture.

Why're you talking like that? Are you Kuon's henchman or something?

"A talking sword, huh? What is it, an artifact?"

"No. It looks like this, but it's actually a Golem. Apparently, one created by Chrom Ranchesse at that. I'm pretty sure he's a he, and he's called Infinite Silver."

Kuon's answer to Yakumo's question shocked me.

Chrom Ranchesse?! The guy who created the crown Golems, like Albus and the others?! Wait, then does that mean...

"Is this the silver crown?!"

"Hoh? That's a name I ain't heard in a long time. Takes me back, sure does... Though I don't got no crown skill, so I dunno if you can call me a complete crown."

The sword, Silver, wiggled as if shaking his nonexistent head.

"You don't have a crown skill?"

"Chrom was tryin' ta make a Golem that could use a crown skill without havin' a cost tied to it. I ended up comin' outta that."

Albus had mentioned something like that, so the story added up.

Chrom Ranchesse had traveled between worlds over five thousand years ago with the power of the black and white crowns. But then, he needed to escape from the Phrase invasion some time later. The problem was that if he used the black crown's power, he'd have to pay the price and would likely die as a result. That was why he was trying his best to make a crown that didn't require any compensation to use its power.

Unfortunately, the Phrase invasion came in full force before he could complete those new crowns, and the white crown went berserk.

“Hm? Wait a sec... You’re a Gollem, right? Does that mean you made a pact with Kuon?”

“Sure did, sir!”

“What?! You never said anything like that!”

Silver’s response caused Kuon to speak up in a panic.

Hm? What happened here?

“I’m a Gollem and an Artificer. If the conditions match up, you get automatically contracted with me.”

Silver seemed awfully nonchalant as he explained the situation. Apparently, all Artificers that fell under the intelligent weapon subcategory were like that. Only those who met the right criteria could wield them, and apparently, Silver’s personality was modified by the person who wielded him as well.

“My last wielder was this crazy killer fella. He used to cut people to bits at least three times a day. The contract was still loomin’ over me even after he passed, so that affected my noggin a bit.”

“Ohhh... That’s why you were so murder-crazy when we first met? Huh? Wait, so then the way you’re acting and talking now is because of me...?”

Kuon looked deeply bothered by the realization.

“Yup. If you was scareda me, I might have a different personality. But the way I am now is the perfect match fer you, kiddo! Ya tamed me good!”

Kuon’s expression soured further. I just wanted to know what the hell he’d done to this sword.

Wait, if this is the silver crown, then won’t the wicked devout be after this thing to open the Ark up?

“Silver, do you know anything about the gold crown?”

“Gold? I don’t know too much about that’n, ’cause I was mostly kept in the lab. But if I remember right, Chrom said it was like me. An Artificer.”

It’s an Artificer? I guess that makes sense. Chrom was from a world where magical creatures weren’t all that common, so the chance to use one as the basis for his newest crowns was probably a no-brainer.

Artificers had a lot of variety, though. They could be Golems, Gargoyles, Mimics, or any other kind of construct.

Hmm... Come to think of it, Golems and Golems aren’t all that dissimilar. Maybe they’d have good synergy if combined...

“What kind of weapon is this sword, anyway?! How efficient is it in battle?!” Frei asked as she eagerly made grabby hands toward Silver, who was nervously hovering away from her. I had a feeling this might happen...

“Well, lassie. I can be as big or as small as I wanna be! I’m the perfect sword fer any occasion!”

“Our father’s sword, Brunhild, can do that too. That’s not so special,” Frei replied, looking a little bit underwhelmed.

Wow... I guess this thing has [Modeling] applied to it too.

“I-I can slash enemies from a distance as well...”

“Father’s sword can also attack from a distance.”

“Hah! Well, I betcha his sword can’t paralyze yer enemies like I can!”

“Father’s sword can do that! He can even swap out ammunition to imbue other effects like forced sleeping or burning!”

Silver faltered slightly at that revelation, and I couldn’t help but feel a bit sorry for the animated blade. Part of me felt a little guilty, honestly.

“I-I can speak...”

My Brunhild definitely couldn’t do that...but tons of ancient Gollems had that capability, so it was hardly unique.

“So he’s just a really old, less powerful version of Brunhild...? Sad.”

“Gwah!”

Yoshino’s casual comment sent piercing damage through Silver’s core. The poor blade drooped listlessly.

Okay, yeah, I feel really bad for this thing...

“Come on, now. Silver still has his uses. He’s annoying, and he can’t keep quiet either, but I have to admit he’s surprisingly sturdy. You wouldn’t expect it, but he’s a functional sword in his own right. He subverts your expectations.”

“Dang it, kiddo! Are you praising me or mocking me?!” Silver roared, groaning in exasperation in response to Kuon’s backhanded compliment.

Damn, that was harsh... Maybe my son’s got a hidden dark side.

“He’s quite similar to you, Touya...”

I pretended not to hear what Lu had said.

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“You’ve got seven mystic eyes?!”

“I do, yes. I have seven varieties of the mystic eye, and I can manifest them in either my right or my left.”

I was startled by what Kuon had told me. I’d never heard of more than one mystic eye in the same person before, let alone seven.

Typically, the person who had a mystic eye had one eye that was a different color from the other. Homura, one of our kunoichi agents, had a mystic eye that allowed her to see over long distances. The eye

imbued with this power had a slightly brown tinge to it. In Kuon's case, however, both of his eyes were as black as mine.

"Could you show me how it works?"

"Of course. Could you summon a **[Light Orb]** for me?"

I didn't know why he needed that, but I did as he requested and summoned one.

Suddenly, one of Kuon's eyes glowed a golden hue with a faint blue tinge. The orb I'd summoned dissipated when he looked at it.

What the heck?

"That was the mystic eye of nullification. It neutralizes magic, but only if it's in my line of sight."

*Wow, that's pretty impressive. That's similar to my **[Absorb]** spell, isn't it?*

"A-Amazing! Kuon! Can you show us more?! Please!"

Yumina was just about bursting with excitement. She was clearly very happy to learn her son had inherited a power similar to her own. I could understand how she felt, but she was definitely being a helicopter parent...

Kuon began to explain his seven-hued mystic eyes to us, and how each color worked.

■Green: The Mystic Eye of Subordination. It allowed him to take control of animals, magical beasts, and monsters.

■Yellow: The Mystic Eye of Immobilization. It allowed him to freeze objects or people in place.

■Blue: The Mystic Eye of Nullification. It allowed him to nullify magical effects in his line of sight.

■White: The Mystic Eye of Intuition. It allowed him to determine whether or not a person had good intentions.

■Red: The Mystic Eye of Pressurization. It allowed him to exert gravitational pressure on any object he looked at.

■Orange: The Mystic Eye of Precognition. It allowed him brief glimpses into the future.

■Purple: The Mystic Eye of Hallucination. It allowed him to create illusions.

When he used any of these abilities, his irises took on a golden hue with the respective color mixed in. The eyes of Intuition and Precognition were obviously passed down directly from Yumina.

They all sounded useful to me, but each had its own flaws. For example, his Immobilization power would break if he blinked, and his Subordination eye had a twenty-four-hour limit and didn't work on humans. Still, having access to that many abilities on command sure sounded handy.

"Can you use regular magic?"

"I only have access to the null spells **[Slip]** and **[Paralyze]**."

Oh. Those are my two most used spells, aren't they? They're pretty handy ones.

"That's my boy! I knew our son would be a brilliant little thing!"

"A-Ah, mother... That's a little embarrassing..."

Yumina wrapped her arms around Kuon and ruffled his hair. The boy seemed to have a bit of trouble accepting her overbearing affection, but it felt like he was pretty used to it.

"She is so loving and cuddly, she is..."

"I've never seen Yumina like that..."

Yae and Lu were right. No matter how you looked at the situation, Yumina resembled an older sister who was way too doting toward her younger brother.

“He’s pretty stiff, though. Polite’s fine, but young boys should have more guts, don’t you think? Just what kind of upbringing did Yumina have him undergo?”

“Hmph! He’s fine as he is, I’ll have you know. A prince should be well mannered, graceful, and courteous above all else. That’s how my son should be! He’s well educated and pure of heart! Clearly, I raised him perfectly!”

Yumina snapped back at Elze’s comment, only for Arcia to speak up in turn.

“Actually, Mother Yumina...you’re often busy with state affairs. Kuon’s education and upbringing was largely the product of another party...”

“What?! Who?!”

Yumina and I blinked in surprise, prompting my other kids to slowly turn their heads to look at a certain someone... It was a particular white tiger cub who was sprawled out by the side of the couch.

“Hm?”

“Kohaku?!”

“Kohaku has been by Kuon’s side since he was a little boy. She even taught him how to speak.”

A-Ah! That’s it! The way he speaks is similar to how Kohaku speaks with me! So that’s why he’s so polite!

Arcia went on to elaborate, explaining that everything about Kuon from his manners, his fighting skills, and even his ballroom dancing abilities and general princely decorum were all taught to him by Kohaku.

“So Kohaku isn’t just a bodyguard for Kuon in the future... She’s his teacher too...”

“I see... Goodness, I ought to be proud of myself. I suppose my future self is still working hard. That’s nice to know.”

“Ugh... Just what kind of mother am I...?”

Kohaku seemed pleased, but Yumina’s shoulders slumped by her side.

“Don’t be down, mother. You support father diligently and strive to make our country a better place. I have a deep and true respect for you, of that you can be sure.”

“Touya! Isn’t our son so cute?!”

Yumina began to stroke and pet Kuon’s hair again.

...Stop doing that. He’s gonna go bald.

As I quietly feared for my son’s future hairline issues, the nearby door slammed open. Quun charged toward the couch, having apparently returned from Agarthia.

“Where’s the silver crown?!”

Her words prompted everyone to grimace... She clearly couldn’t care less about her brother showing up.

Quun eyed the sword and immediately snatched it up.

“Aha! To think that the silver crown was a weapon-type Golem. Chrom Ranchesse’s legacy is in my hands... Mu ha ha ha... The doctor might have the Gigantes, but I have this! It’s all mine!”

“K-Kiddo! This girl’s scary! I don’t like those eyes! There’s somethin’ dark in those eyes!” Silver screamed out in fear.

Leen suddenly stepped in to stop her daughter from fleeing to Babylon.

“Halt. You owe your brother some words of welcome, at least. And that sword is his, not yours. Is my daughter so selfish? Do you have no shame? Would you really steal from your brother?”

“Owie!”

Leen karate-chopped Quun’s head. I wasn’t surprised. She was basically asking for it.

“Oh, er... Sorry... Welcome back, Kuon. I’m glad to see you’re well. Can I take your sword?” Quun grumbled quietly after being scolded. Her mind was clearly still on Silver, though, so she turned and made a request. Leen didn’t seem all that impressed by how curt the girl’s words were, however.

“Quun...”

“Mother Leen, please don’t be angry. Quun is often like this when she wants something, but it’s fine. I originally intended on handing the sword off to her anyway...”

“Whaaat?! K-Kiddo! Kiddo?! Kiddo?! We’re allies, ain’t we?! Best pals?! Y-You’d never let somethin’ so rotten happen to me, right?! Wouldja?! Right?!”

“I originally picked you up for Quun, as a souve... Errrm... It’s okay, she’ll take good care of you.”

...Were you just about to call him a souvenir to his nonexistent face?

Perhaps Silver’s desperate flailing worked. Kuon suddenly changed his expression and spoke up again.

“Don’t break him, Quun. I’ll want him back.”

“Of course I won’t! I know how precious he is! I’m just gonna have the doctor use **[Analyze]** on him to figure out how he ticks!”

Analysis magic, huh? I could use that too, but I guess I wouldn't really understand any of the information I get. It's comparable to running a CT scan on him.

"I don't like this..." Silver wailed quietly, vibrating his blade as if to emulate shaking in fear. He really was expressive for a sword.

"Forget about the sword for now! Clothes! We need to get Kuon some proper clothes! Let's go to Zanak's store at once!"

"Hm? What's wrong with my clothes?"

Yumina's remark prompted Kuon to look down at his front. His clothing certainly looked like they were of fine make, but the wear and tear they'd taken over the course of Kuon's journey was definitely visible. Yumina likely thought it was unacceptable for a prince to dress so shabbily.

"Oh! Lemme come too! I'll come! I can pick out some clothes that'll look great on Kuon!" Allis exclaimed, placing her hand in the air and jumping on the spot all the while.

A-Allis, behind you... Behind you... Your dad looks like he's trying his hardest not to scream in envy...

I looked at Kuon, who simply shrugged and sighed. The reaction made me think he was used to this kind of thing from Allis and her dad.

"If that's the case, then I'll come as well. Shall we, Elna? I'd love to dress you up in more cute outfits..."

"Huh? B-But we just bought some the other day..."

Elze's comment prompted Elna to stiffen up and mutter. Elze bought tons of clothes for all the kids, but she loved dressing up Elna the most. The poor thing. As much as I pitied her, though, I wasn't going to stop Elze. I was Elna's father, and frankly, I liked seeing her all dressed up and cute too.

Yumina probably felt the same way about Kuon. She probably had the motherly urge to dress him up, and I wasn't about to stand in the way of that.

I opened up a **[Gate]** to an alley not far from Zanac's store.

"All right, go on. Kohaku, Yakumo, you go help them too. Just open up another portal to come back when you're done."

"Of course."

"Come along, Kuon! Mommy's gonna dress you up!"

Yumina grabbed her son by the hand and yanked him through the portal. Allis, Kohaku, Elze, Elna, and Yakumo followed after them. I abruptly closed the **[Gate]** just before Ende was about to charge in.

"The hell was that for, Touya?!"

"If you're there, Kuon won't be able to relax. Be a little more considerate, okay?"

"Gah! I just wanted to buy some clothes for Allis, that's all! I wasn't planning on glaring at your son so he stops acting all flirty with my kid or anything!"

That's exactly what you were planning, man.

Ende growled quietly before opening the doors to the balcony and leaping away. Zanac's store wasn't too far from the castle, so he was either planning to warp there or hoof it on foot. Given how fast he could run, it'd probably only take him about two minutes if he decided on the latter.

Sorry, Kuon... You'll have to bear with Allis's nutty dad for a while.

"Honestly, Ende's such a moronic parent at times. It's not that big of a deal that his daughter's interested in someone. He should suck it up."

My offhand comment led to Frei, Quun, and Arcia staring at me with dumbfounded expressions on their faces.

What's the big deal?

"Such an incredible lack of self-awareness..."

"The father I know glares at every boy who comes within talking distance of us. Do you really think you're in a position to judge Allis's father?"

"Care to repeat what you just said, father? I'd like to record it for posterity."

I'm going to make the tactical decision to ignore everything they just said.

"Anyway, Quun...want me to drop off the raw materials from Gandhilis in the hangar?"

I turned to my technically-minded daughter, who was waving Silver around without a care in the world.

You probably shouldn't be swinging that around indoors or... Yep. There goes Leen with the karate chop again.

The raw materials from Gandhilis were supposed to be provided to us at a bulk discount, but after the discovery of Agarthia and the dismantling of the Gigantes, Gandhilis decided to let us have the materials for free in exchange for the debris for the battle. Frankly, I felt a little bad accepting all of that for no cost at all, but I decided to take the kind offer regardless.

"Mnh... Put everything in the hangar, please. The design is just about finalized, so we can start production ASAP," Quun said, rubbing her head as she replied to me.

The number of resources we'd received was beyond extreme, so I couldn't even begin to imagine what they were going to create with it all. They were going to make an Over Gear for Albus, but they

probably had enough to make a multipart machine like the Gigantes...

“Just wait and see, okay? Anyway, I’m off to analyze the silver crown!”

Quun whooshed away with all the speed and grace of a raging wind. I had a feeling that Albus’s Over Gear wasn’t the top priority in her mind...

“Honestly, she’s beyond hopeless... She could learn a lot from Kuon. Maybe I should have Kohaku educate her when she’s born...”

I’m not so sure that’d work, Leen. Kuon’s a bit of a special case. Besides, Granny Tokie said the time spirits are gonna keep things mostly the same, so I doubt we’ll be able to modify her personality to that extent. Still, I guess if we had enough divinity and made a really concentrated effort...

That meant even the wicked god could’ve impacted the future if I’d let it destroy the world, but obviously that didn’t happen. Though, that really made me think that the reason Granny Tokie couldn’t return the kids to the future just yet could have something to do with the wicked devout. After all, they wielded muddled divinity. It stood to reason that they could interfere with the future in turn...

“Now that Kuon’s home, we should have a feast to celebrate! Mother, let’s compete to see who can cook the best meal for him!”

“Honestly, Arcia... Haven’t you learned from your prior losses?”

“Hah... I have learned. I know Kuon’s preferences better than you do, after all. That’s why this time I’ll definitely win!”

“Hmm...”

Please stop glaring at each other... I can see the sparks flying between your eyes.

“Arcy really can’t win without cheating, can she?” Frei mumbled, quietly shaking her head and rolling her eyes. The irritation in her voice was palpable.

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“Oho ho ho... This looks good on him. Very princely.”

“He he he... Of course it looks good! He’s our son! Anything would look good on him!”

“Ha ha ha...” Kuon chuckled, smiling awkwardly at Yumina’s proud, cheery face. The poor child clearly felt awkward.

Kuon had returned with his new outfit. He wore a white shirt, a navy blue vest, a navy ribbon tie, and black pants. The entire vibe of his outfit was fairly chic and stylish. He looked the very picture of a prince.

Damn... He looks so gallant... Is this really my son? He probably gets that from Yumina.

I looked over at the mountain of paper bags, wondering just how many outfits she must’ve made him try on at Zanak’s place.

After Kuon settled back in, Arcia and Lu served a sumptuous feast for the whole family. Arcia was well versed in Kuon’s taste, but apparently, Lu had bribed Yoshino and Linne with extra desserts to learn about what Kuon liked too... Thus, the table was filled with all of his favorite meals.

“Grrr... This isn’t fair!” Arcia complained as she pouted and stomped her feet.

...You’re complaining when you had an unfair advantage from the start? You don’t really have the right.

The two of them pressed Kuon to make a decision on which of the dishes he liked the most, but he simply responded with, “Come now,

this was food made by my lovely family. How could you make me choose?”

I made a mental note to get him to teach me how to pull that off.

After the meal, Yumina tried to drag Kuon off to bathe with him, but the boy put up such a staunch resistance to the idea that she was forced to relent. Unfortunately for him, however, she then changed her plan of attack and dragged him to sleep in the same bed as her instead. I couldn't blame Yumina, since she'd been warmly waiting for her son for a long time. She probably wanted to get as much out of their time together as possible.

“Ah, how nice... I wanna meet Steph soon too.”

Sue looked a bit jealous as she watched Yumina drag Kuon off to the bedroom. The only child who had yet to arrive was Sue's daughter, Stephania. It was only natural that Sue would feel a bit left out.

I hugged her in an attempt to cheer her up.

“Don't worry about it, Sue. Kuon's here now, so Steph can't be far behind.”

“...Mmm. When she shows up, I'm gonna look after her. I'm gonna bathe with her, and play games with her, and she'll sleep next to me too!”

“Mhm... We'll both sleep with her in the middle, okay?”

“Okay...”

Sue was still a little grumpy, but I was pleased to see that she'd settled down a little.

Linne and Elna tottered over to Sue, each of them grabbing one of her hands.

“I'll sleep with you tonight!”

“M-Me too... You're our mom as well...”

“Wh-What’s with you two? It’s not like I’m lonely or anything! B-But... Ahem... I mean, if you really, really wanna stay in my room... Sure.”

Elze and Linze watched the scene with little smirks on their faces. Sue leaned in and gave both of the young girls a big hug.

In that moment, I felt pretty lucky to have such a kindhearted family.

◇ ◇ ◇

The next morning...

Kuon was carted off to the training ground at the crack of dawn by Yae and Hilde. They fought against him in a sword match, with the rule that he couldn’t use any of his mystic eyes. He wasn’t quite on Yakumo or Frei’s level in terms of head-on combat, but it was clear that even at the tender age of six he was far stronger than most of the adventurers out there.

According to Yakumo and the other girls, who’d been watching the fight, Kuon had been trained by Yae, Hilde, and Moroha since he was young. It certainly showed.

Also, apparently Yakumo and Frei were no match for Kuon when he used his mystic eyes. Specifically, the mystic eye of Immobilization was the real problem for them, since he could use it to make them freeze on the spot. They also told me that if they focused hard enough, they could actually break out of it, but ordinary humans probably wouldn’t be able to do that. Then they went on to say that if they could make Kuon blink, he couldn’t use the effect on them, so when fighting him they typically went for his eyes right away... That made me seriously question their training methods.

“Kuon! It’s me!” Allis called out to my son from across the field.

Someone’s awfully energetic today... Oh? The Phrase girls are here too?

Melle, Ney, and Lycee followed after Allis, who was making a rapid beeline for Kuon.

“What brings you three here? Where’s Ende at?”

“Endymion is working at the guild today. We wished to meet the boy that our daughter won’t stop talking about.”

“That’s right. Even if he’s your son, we have to make sure he isn’t some kind of a creep...”

“Yep. We gotta vet him ourselves.”

Damn... Here to evaluate him, eh? Guess it isn’t just Ende who’s a little off the deep end...

Melle giggled a little, likely sensing my thoughts.

“If Allis is happy with him, and he’s a good boy, I have no objections. I just want to meet the child who may well be my son-in-law someday.”

“Yeah, I guess...”

Melle and the others turned to look at Kuon, who was in the middle of a clash with Yae.

...They’re pretty much unofficially engaged, huh? But that’s the kind of thing I can worry about in the future. Way, way in the future... Wait, wouldn’t that make Allis the eventual grand duchess of Brunhild? Is that okay? Maybe we should consider giving her parents the funding for a proper ladylike education...if only for the sake of public relations...

◇ ◇ ◇

“Wh-What are you saying, Touya? I don’t understand! Yumina’s son? Our grandson?”

I wasn’t surprised by the man’s shock. I was in Belfast Castle, breaking the news to King Belfast and his wife. Prince Yamato,

Yumina's little brother, was napping peacefully against his mother's bosom.

"There was a Space-time accident in the future, and he's kind of been brought back in time. But he'll be going back in the next few months, so don't worry or anything."

"I... I... Right. That's not really... Okay."

Yeah, I get it. It's a lot to adjust to.

"And here I thought I was getting used to the peculiarities surrounding you, but this might just take the cake..."

The king let out an exasperated sigh.

Hey, c'mon...it wasn't even my doing this time.

"It's my first time meeting you in this era, but it is a pleasure. I am Mochizuki Kuon, Kuon being my given name. Grandfather, grandmother, I'm very happy to see the two of you in such good health."

"O-Oh, of course... Thank you for your courtesy."

The sight of Kuon bowing his head so reverently led to the king instinctively bowing his head in turn.

Hah... He really just has that effect on people, doesn't he?

"He's certainly a polite child, isn't he? Especially for his age..."

"He he he! Isn't he?! That's my Kuon! A prince among princes, that's for sure!" Yumina proclaimed as she grinned and puffed her chest out with pride.

...Yumina, you're really turning into a crazy doting parent. I guess I don't really have any room to judge, though. Kuon's intelligent, well-dressed, has a kind face much like Yumina's, and he has a gentle personality to match his looks. Of course he's a fine prince! I'd love to

sing his praises more, but I need to calm myself... Ugh, I really am just as bad as Yumina...

The king and queen were even more surprised when I told them about the other children. I conveniently left out the part about how I'd already told the other relevant world leaders about this as well, of course.

"And all of the other children are girls, you say?"

"That's right. Kuon's my only son."

King Belfast's eyes gleamed with interest and joy at my response.

"Then he'll be the next duke of Brunhild! Incredible, Yumina!"

"Indeed! I did it, father!"

I didn't really get it, but the two of them seemed extremely excited. It was pretty important for royal families to produce heirs, so I suppose I could understand to an extent.

Queen Yuel turned to Kuon as she cradled Yamato in her arms and asked, "Then, young prince...that would make you Yamato's nephew, yes?"

"Please call me Kuon, grandmother. And yes, Uncle Yamato would play with me a lot when I was a little boy."

When you were a little boy? You're still one... Hell, you're bigger than your uncle in this time period.

According to Kuon, Yamato Belfast and Edward Ortlinde both played with our kids a lot. Yoshino's **[Teleport]** and Yakumo's **[Gate]** made visiting their estates a breeze.

Apparently, my kids had a habit of warping into Belfast Castle at their own discretion, and they felt like they had the run of the place. I couldn't help but feel a little apologetic about that.

I made eyes that tried to spell out how sorry I was to the king, but then I noticed Queen Yuel leaning in closer to Kuon.

“S-So then, what kind of person is Yamato? Is he doing well as the heir to Belfast’s throne?! Could you tell me more?!”

“E-Er...of course. Uncle Yamato is a righteous man who puts the wishes of the people before anything else. He’s very in touch with his nation. Father said that he has all the makings of a true king.”

“Really now? Oh my, really?! Well, that’s wonderful!”

“Ahhh! Of course! That’s my son for you!”

“Mnhhh...”

Kuon’s words prompted the king and queen to cheer and rave about their sleeping son.

...Well, I guess he has my future endorsement? That’s nice... I don’t think I’d flatter him for no reason, so it’s gotta be true. Guess that means Belfast’s secure for at least another generation.

The two royals asked Kuon a mountain of questions, but he had to dance around a few of the more specific ones. I didn’t even have to step in. Kuon seemed smart enough to know what Granny Tokie wouldn’t want him to mention. And unfortunately for them, he wasn’t half as loose with his lips as Allis was.

After we returned to Brunhild, Allis dragged him out of the castle. Apparently, she wanted to take him somewhere. Yumina tried to go with them, but Leen stopped her. She said that a mother tagging along on a date was a recipe for disaster, and a line had to be drawn somewhere.

“I only just became a parent...but he’s already separated from me...”

“It’s not like you gave birth. It’s okay.”

I patted Yumina on the back. That day still had to come, though... Thankfully, it was still a while off.

“Your Highness.”

“Hm? Tsubaki?”

Just as I was thinking about the future, the head of Brunhild’s intelligence corps appeared before me. I wondered what she wanted.

“We’ve heard reports of strange chimeric beasts being spotted. This time in a fishing village along the coastline of Rhea.”

Again, huh?

The wicked devout were creating these weird octahedrons that they then used to create beastly Chimeras.

These half-fish beings had been spotted all around the world. They weren’t especially strong, but if you were bitten or scratched by one of them, you’d be contaminated by their curse. Anyone wounded by a Fishman would find themselves running a high fever and a gradual mutation. Eventually, they’d become a Fishman too. They’d lose their feelings, their memories, their very sense of self...and then they’d escape into the sea. It was a vile method employed by the wicked devout to bolster the ranks of their armies.

These Chimeras also had traces of the muddled divinity once held by the wicked god, so I couldn’t even use **[Search]** to find them. It was a really irritating situation. I could probably find them by using **[Search]** infused with divinity, but the range for that was still too narrow to scour every sea in the world...

Thankfully, they’d never appeared in Brunhild so far, but Brunhild was landlocked. We technically owned the dungeon islands, though, which were in the middle of the sea.

“What’s the damage in Rhea?”

“The affected village was immediately evacuated, though some stayed behind to defend their homes. By the time Rhea’s Golem soldiers reached the site of the attack, nobody remained...”

That meant the victims had probably been infected, transformed, and fled into the waves... Their base was presumably somewhere underwater, after all.

I had Sango and Kokuyou order their water-dwelling subordinates to search through the seas and report anything suspicious, but that hadn’t yielded any results despite the fact that they’d been actively searching for a while.

The reason for the slow going was that while dolphins, seals, and turtles were intelligent enough to understand the mission, more regular sea dwellers like small fish couldn’t really keep up with the commands and thus were much slower to get the message.

Damn, guess those fish should’ve stayed in...school. Heh... He he he...

Either way, I just needed to bide my time and wait for them to come up with something.

I’d also asked Kougyoku to tell her avian subordinates to keep watch from the skies too. After all, it was only a theory of mine that they were based underwater.

Oh! I should have the birds keep an eye out for Steph too! If what the other kids have said is true, then she’ll probably cause a commotion someplace or other.

I quietly sent a telepathic message to Kougyoku.

◇ ◇ ◇

“Look! Look! Betcha didn’t know this bakery was here even back during this period! The bread’s a little different from how we know it, but it’s so nice!”

Allis dragged Kuon by the wrist, pointing up at a nearby bakery on the corner of the street. The sight of it reminded him of how he and Allis would often buy bread there, or at least, the version of this place in their own era. He wondered if the fact that the bread tasted different meant that the bakers weren't quite as skilled as they'd be in the future.

The baker was arranging the bread inside. Kuon recognized his face. Both he and Allis were familiar with this man. Why, he'd even give them extra pastries from time to time as a treat. But the face he quietly observed now was far younger than the one he'd come to be friendly with.



“It’s funny, don’t you think? How we know many people in this town far more than they know us.”

“Mhm! I feel the same way!”

Kuon had lived in this castle town since he was born, as had Allis. There were fewer buildings than they were used to, but it was still very familiar and it didn’t take much time for them to get used to it.

The two walked onward until they reached their favorite spot. It was a park up on a hilltop. There wasn’t any playground equipment, just a few benches for sitting on. Despite the lack of amenities, however, it was a well-known and popular sightseeing spot that had a scenic view of Brunhild’s surroundings.

“Ahhh... Everything feels way more familiar from up here, right?”

“No, I’d argue differently. See that red-roofed house? It’s not there in our time. That small house is much larger where we’re from as well. And...”

“Gosh, Kuon. You’re too fussy!”

Allis puffed out her cheeks. From Kuon’s perspective, Allis wasn’t nearly meticulous or fussy enough. He might have even considered her a bit sloppy. Though of course, he dared not say it. He’d learned from a young age that if you started a fight with a woman, it usually ended badly.

“I hope Steph hurries up and comes back to us.”

“Indeed... Thinking about what she might be up to makes me uneasy. Without anyone to hold her back, she might be doing something outrageous already...”

When Kuon thought of his younger sister, the youngest of all the siblings, he couldn’t help but be concerned. Steph was very much Sue’s daughter. She was a chaotic freewheeler who marched to the

beat of her own drum. She was the most free spirited out of every one of her siblings, and so she regularly pursued fleeting interests on the spur of the moment. Kuon couldn't begin to count the number of times she'd gotten herself into danger as a result. He quietly hoped she'd just come home without making a huge mess, but he also knew that was a futile hope.

When they got caught in the timequake, Kuon and Steph were right next to each other. That could only mean that Steph was already here, that she'd probably been here as long as Kuon had. And yet, she wasn't in Brunhild. Either that was because she'd been dropped off some far distance away or she'd gotten wrapped up in some kind of incident...

Kuon could only pray that it wouldn't be something with diplomatic consequences. And as Kuon let out a sigh, a sheathed sword flew from the sky and smacked right into the ground in front of him, standing on end. It was the silver crown, Infinite Silver. The one Quun had taken away earlier.

"Kiddo! Do somethin' about that girl, wouldja?! She nearly filed me down! Scared the proverbial crap outta me!"

"Ah... You escaped from Babylon already? How did you find me?"

Kuon looked up at the sky. Babylon was up there, but the stealth field was active, so just about nobody could tell.

"Yer my master, kiddo. That's enough to find you. If ya call me, I can find you no matter where you are. If we're close enough, I can even warp into yer hand!"

"Wow, that's some utility..."

Kuon was impressed by how useful the sword seemed. If only it didn't have that dreadful personality. As those quiet thoughts ran through Kuon's mind, however, his phone began to ring. It was Quun. She was probably calling about Silver.

“Hello?”

“Ah, Kuon? Is Silver over there?”

“He is, but...did you do something weird to him?”

“No, of course not! I ran a small electrical current through it, then tested its durability with a little bit of sulfuric acid... I was about to file it down a little, but it broke free from the workbench restraints and flew off!”

Kuon began to understand why the sword was so afraid. From Silver’s perspective, he’d basically been strapped down and tortured. Quun didn’t really think of him as a person, so she didn’t seem to have an issue with what she’d done, but the poor sword was still trembling.

“Did you find anything interesting out?”

“A little. Silver is a Gollem and an Artificer at the same time. It still has a Q-Crystal and a G-Cube, but it’s fundamentally different from the other crowns. Also, its blade is at least as powerful and durable as the phrasium weapons our father made. Though, given that it was created to combat the Phrase invasion all those thousands of years ago, that makes sense.”

Kuon told Quun he’d be looking after Silver for the time being, causing the enchanted blade to look visibly relieved. He was expressive, for a sword without any distinguishable facial features, anyway.

Kuon was impressed by what he’d heard. The sword kept on exceeding the poor expectations it had left him with during their first encounter. Unfortunately, Silver still spoke, and he was still pretty annoying. So as impressive as he was, it was hard to offset those drawbacks.

“I wonder if we can fix you properly with the right discipline...”

“What?! Y-You’re givin’ me scary vibes, kid! Your face is like that fairy girl’s!” Silver exclaimed, then slinked back in a panic. Silver was a Gollem, but he was also an Artificer. That meant he could probably be trained like a dog. Or at least, that was what Kuon reasoned. The boy decided it was probably too late for something like that, however.

“Hmph... Kuooon! You keep talking to that sword instead of me! Quit doting on it!”

“I’m hardly doting on it...”

Allis grumbled a little. She felt a little left out. It had been so long since she and Kuon had gotten to go out on a date together, but now they’d been interrupted. Kuon himself seemed fairly ignorant of those feelings, however.

“Hey, kiddo! Who’s this little thing?”

“I’m not some little thing! I’m Allis! Kuon’s wife!”

“We’re not even engaged yet...”

Before Kuon could finish speaking, Silver suddenly swooped through the air and started raising his voice at Allis.

“Hah! Think you’re hot stuff just because you’re his wife, little lady? Well, I’m his lifelong pal! We’re fated to be together! Ever heard of a little saying that goes ‘live by the sword, die by the sword’?! Well, I’m the sword in his life! Don’t think you can take my place, pipsqueak!”

“P-Pipsqueak?! You’ve got a lot of nerve for a rusty old sword! Brunhild’s a way better weapon than you!”

“Huh?! What’d you say?!”

The girl and the animated blade wouldn’t stop yelling at each other. Kuon had to step in before things got too heated. He didn’t want it to escalate to a fist(?) fight.

“...If you two keep bickering, I’m going to leave. I’ll call Quun and Melle on you.”

With that, the argument immediately ceased.

“There. That’s better. Now, how about you two make up?”

“But...”

“But...”

The two of them grumbled quietly, prompting Kuon to grin slyly and bring his phone up to his ear.

“W-We’ll make up!”

“W-We’ll make up!”

The two chanted in unison. Allis reached out her hand and shook Silver’s hilt. She seemed to be squeezing tight enough for Silver’s metal to creak, but Kuon paid that no mind.

“Now then, shall we go and eat? Oh, wait. I don’t have any money on hand...”

Kuon initially had so little money that he needed to decide between buying souvenirs in Regulus and getting a ride home. In the end, he’d gotten the free ride, so he went with the souvenirs, but that had just about cleared him out.

“That’s okay, I can pay! I got some money from that time I fought the Needpog Dragon with Linne and the others!”

“Oh, I don’t know about making you treat me...”

Kuon felt a bit reluctant. His mothers had always told him that a prince needed to be kind to women and children and to never burden them. He also had a degree of personal pride on the line here.

“Hmm... I don’t want you to waste any of your hard-earned money on me, okay? I’ll think of something...”

“Money troubles, kiddo? Aren’t you a prince? Can’t ya just ask yer old man for some pocket money?”

“We try to be self-sufficient in my family. Even my father makes most of his money from the adventurer’s guild. It wouldn’t be right to spend the taxpayers’ coin on personal luxuries.”

All of Brunhild’s state revenue was allocated back to state development projects. The living expenses for the Brunhild royal family were paid for entirely out of the grand duke’s pocket.

He earned money from the guild, he had the Strand Company sell his inventions, and he rented out Frame Gears to other nations as well. Even though Touya’s family was a large one, all those ventures helped him keep them living in the lap of luxury.

Babylon was definitely a financial sink, however. Development costs never seemed to stop up there.

“Then how about we make some money?! If we go out of town and hunt some monsters or beasts, you can cover a meal by trading it with the guild!”

“A beast, eh? Oh, right. I guess I don’t need a guild card to do some hunting... Hm... That sounds like a good idea.”

Brunhild’s lands didn’t have much in the way of monsters. This was largely because so many adventurers lived in and around the castle town because of the dungeon island portals. Still, that didn’t mean there were no monsters at all. In fact, if you were to look for them, you’d surely be able to stumble upon some.

“Well, I’d like enough money to cover a meal with you. Shall we go?”

“Yes! Yay! Just the two of us!”

“Hold it, missy! I’m coming too!”

Mentally tuning out the cries of “You stupid sword!”, “You tiny brat!”, and other such argumentative phrases, Kuon picked up his phone to tell his parents he’d be headed out of town. The boy was always diligent, after all.

Afterword

Hello again, and thanks for reading *In Another World With My Smartphone Volume 25*. I hope you enjoyed it.

We had a few different viewpoints depicted in this volume, from Touya to Kuon to Yakumo. Things have certainly gotten a lot busier since the kids showed up, huh? Touya's losing the spotlight a bit lately! Stay tuned to see if he can get it back.

By the way, volume 26 is going to come with a drama CD! (Japanese release only.) This'll be the third one. The second one came with Volume 19, and that was over two years ago already...

We've actually been planning the third drama CD ever since the second one was made. The guys in charge were like, "More! More!" right off the bat. However, I didn't manage to complete a script until recently. I wrote a bit, then the inspiration just stopped flowing for a while. I can't really do anything other than admit it was all my fault and apologize for the delay.

I didn't have any deadlines, so I just kind of put some stuff on the back burner. I also ended up delaying the webnovel stuff I'm writing, my manuscript draft for this volume, and some other drafts too...and I don't really have any excuses.

The third drama CD is about Touya and company going to a certain city and getting caught up in a mystery surrounding the town's clock tower... Hopefully, you guys find it fun.

We're releasing the special editions of the volume (Japan only) in limited quantities, so please be sure to preorder it if you want to get your hands on a copy.

Well then, time for my usual words of thanks.

Eiji Usatsuka, your illustrations were great as ever. Thanks for your hard work on the kids this volume. There's only one kid left to be revealed, so I hope our readers look forward to that next volume.

I'd also like to thank K, the Hobby Japan editorial department, and everyone else involved in the publication process.

And as always, I need to thank those of you who read my webnovel online, as well as those of you who are reading the published light novel version. Thanks so much.

Patora Fuyuhara

Bonus Short Stories

The Hoverboard

“Now I just apply [**Levitation**] to put the finishing touches on it, and voila!”

I looked over the completed project with a smile on my face. It was a board around twenty centimeters wide and eighty centimeters long that floated just a little bit off the ground. It was a hoverboard, a floating piece of equipment that appeared in a famous time travel movie. Much like the one in the movie, you could rest on it with one foot and push off the ground.

I took a step forward and pressed my foot down on it. However, it didn't touch the ground no matter how hard I pressed. I kicked off the ground and it went careening forward, so I quickly hopped onto it with both feet and began to ride.

I tilted my weight to the right a little, and the [**Program**] I'd enchanted into the board activated, causing it to veer right. Then, I did the same to the left. It was all working perfectly. I applied more pressure to my back foot, and the board bounced up a little. I could weave left and right without having to kick off the ground easily enough.

Just as I was starting to think about what kind of course I could make with Earth magic...

“Wow, dad! What's that?! What're you making over there?”

“Wow, Grand Duke! That looks like fun!”

Linne and Allis ran across the courtyard, having caught sight of me experimenting with my new toy.

“I wanna ride too, dad! Lemme try! Please please, pleeease!”

“Oh, me too! Can we? Can we?”

“I’m still testing it out right now...”

Despite my protests, I couldn’t resist the children as they pressed me further and further... Before long, I’d lost my hoverboard entirely. Linne had stolen it.

Since my prototype had been stolen, I decided to just make another one. Luckily, it was easier to make the second time around, since I already knew what to do. And then, just as I finished...Allis snatched it away from me. Pain. Such pain...

I watched the two girls riding the boards around the courtyard. They kicked off at high speeds and even started hovering off the sides of the nearby walls. Just how high were they planning to go? It’d be bad if someone stuck their head out of the window and got a face full of hoverboard...

I quickly walked over and told them to stay on the safer side of things, then constructed a rudimentary half-pipe ramp with Earth magic for them to play on.

“Dad, can you make this into a full circle?”

“A circle? Huh?”

Linne directed my Earth magic until I’d constructed a sloped roof for the half-pipe...effectively turning it into one big pipe. I then stared in disbelief as the two girls began hovering on their boards at full speed, doing loop-di-loops on the inside of the tube tunnel I’d created. I knew the feat was possible with enough centrifugal force, but I hadn’t expected them to get right into it...

“This is so cool!”

“Linne, Linne! Do a flip!”

The girls did a bunch of tricks on their hoverboards until I felt a cold chill behind me... Linze was here. She stomped toward us, anger blazing in her eyes. Apparently, Linne and Allis were in the middle of

a study session, and they'd skittered away to have fun with me instead. The two were summarily dismounted from their boards and dragged back to the study corner with extreme prejudice.

Once they were gone, I got back on my hoverboard and tried to do a flip. I fell off. Obviously, it was just because I weighed more than the girls, right? Right? Practice makes perfect...

Okinawan Kobudo Arts

"This oughta be right, yessir!"

"Yup, looks perfect!"

Rosetta had created a certain something, and Frei was looking it over in the workshop. She seemed satisfied. That certain something was a pair of large single-edged swords, but they were unusual in that they had some slight warping toward the bottom of their blades.

"So, uh, what's the deal? This some new kind of weapon?" I asked her.

"Mm-hm! Take a look."

Frei brandished the two blades and then crossed them so their grooved parts slid into each other, locking them at the middle. Then, she moved both of the sword hilts in tandem, prompting the blades to crisscross in a swift motion... It was kind of like looking at an oversized pair of garden shears.

"Scissorswords! If you use them right, you can cut the head off a monster easily!"

"That's scary..."

I felt that cutting off a monster's head was a bit grotesque, but I'd certainly done my fair share of that kind of thing in the past... Either way, Frei seemed happy to add a new lethal weapon to her collection.

“Another weird sword, huh?”

“Huh? But I made this based on a weapon you told me about, dad...”

“You did?”

I’d certainly seen weapons like this in anime and video games before, so I must’ve idly told Frei about it at some point, prompting her to get Rosetta to replicate it now.

“Do you know any other cool weapon ideas, dad?”

“Hmm... Cool weapons, huh...? I might be able to think of a few?”

A thought came to mind, and I told Rosetta to make it a reality. It was a simple enough weapon, but I hadn’t seen it in this world before. A pair of thirty-centimeter-long sticks chained together suddenly appeared before us.

“What’s that? Some kind of flail?”

“They’re nunchucks.”

A flail was a short stick with a blunt or spiky thing attached to the end. Apparently, they were originally made to be agricultural tools before knights realized they could be adapted into more functional weapons. A popular type of flail seen in anime and manga was the ball-and-chain flail, which was commonly referred to as a ‘morning star.’ In truth, the morning star was actually a club, not a flail, and it was just a common error that was perpetuated through popular culture.

“So, uh, how do you use it?”

“Similar to a flail. You either swing it or use one of the sticks as a blunt force object.”

I started to swing around the nunchucks like a certain famous kung fu movie star and found myself surprised at how easy it was to use.

“Hiyah! Hyaaaah! Hya—Ow!”

I got carried away and tried to catch it by swinging it over my shoulder and under my armpit, but I ended up thwacking my finger hard instead. It hurt!

“What move was that?”

“...It wasn’t anything specific. I just messed up.”

Did she seriously think that was intentional?

“It doesn’t look like a useful weapon, really...”

“Don’t let looks deceive you, Frei. This kind of weapon is lethal in the right hands.”

“Really?”

I was almost annoyed at Frei’s lack of appreciation for the weapon, so I pulled up a video of the kung fu star I was trying to imitate.

“That’s amazing! He tangled up his enemy’s weapon!”

Frei’s eyes gleamed with excitement as she watched the man on the screen, his skill with the nunchucks far surpassing my own. After watching him for a few moments, she took the weapon from me and began to flail it around in her hands.

“Like this...and then... Hiyah!”

She began to pick up speed, and before long she was wielding the weapon in a manner that was almost identical to the professional in the video I’d just shown her. In her hands, the weapon smoothly wove through the air. She didn’t make a single slipup like I had.

“Hah!”

To finish it off, she struck a similar pose to the one in the video. How could she have mastered it so quickly? I could barely believe what I was seeing.

“This is really interesting! I’m gonna teach Linne and Allis how to use it!”

Frei toddled out of the workshop with stars in her eyes, but I could only stare on blankly.

“...Don’t worry about it, sir.”

Rosetta walked forward and gave me a pitying pat on the back. I just sighed.

Thorough Physical

I had a physical examination recently. I’d been in for a few in the past, but since I’d moved, it was my first time getting a physical at the new place. The reason I needed it was because I suddenly started having chest pains. It was an intense, dull pain that felt like an elephant was leaning against my ribcage, and it lasted hours at a time.

Initially, I thought something was up with my lungs or my heart, but when I went to a respiratory and cardiovascular specialist, they couldn’t detect any issues on that front. For whatever reason, gulping down bread seemed to calm the pain, so I went to a gastroenterologist and had a gastroscopy. However, he said other than a little bit of bile reflux, my stomach was basically fine.

I didn’t want to leave the mystery pain unsolved, and it’d already been two years since my last physical, so I decided to book myself in. I wanted it to be thorough, so I chose a two-day structure and elected to have various other tests done at the same time. The examination started at noon with height and weight measurements, then they tested my eyes and my blood. Those tests went on from noon to 4pm, at which point I hailed a cab and went to the nearby hotel I was staying at.

I was told that on the second day I wasn't allowed to eat anything outside of what they gave me because they wanted to do a gastroscopy, but I'd already had a gastroscopy with another specialist, so I hadn't even opted in for that test. I thought that was kind of annoying, but I did as I was told anyway. Thankfully, it wasn't the second day yet, so I could enjoy a good meal the night before.

The meal at the hotel restaurant was a multi-course dining experience. For starters, there was white asparagus and foie gras salad, followed by mussels. After that came minestrone soup, focaccia, pork, angelica sprouts, onions, and fried potatoes. It was a well-balanced meal. I had a matcha chiffon cake for dessert and washed that down with some green tea.

I finished my meal at around 6 p.m., and from that moment I wasn't allowed to eat a thing until after lunchtime the following day. That wasn't because of the gastroscopy rules or anything—it was just because I needed to have my further blood tests done on an empty stomach. I went to bed shortly afterward, but I don't sleep very well in new environments, so I kept waking up several times throughout the night.

The following morning, I headed back into the hospital and had an echocardiogram, as well as an MRI scan of my whole body, head included. Then, I got a general rundown from the doctor about what the results meant.

Just as I'd braced myself for, the parts that I thought weren't good were indeed not good, but there weren't any unexpected issues or complications, so that was nice. As for the chest pain, the whole reason I'd done all that in the first place...

It was inconclusive. I was extremely disappointed, but there wasn't exactly anything I could do.

That test was back in June 2021, and at the time of writing, it's currently October 2021. I'm happy to say that the pain is much less severe than it was back then. The medication that the gastroenterologist gave me for my bile reflux is probably the main factor. Even if I don't know the exact cause, I've been feeling a bit better since I started taking it.

I want to take care of my health as much as possible going forward, but it's tough sometimes! The world is full of unhealthy temptations!



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In Another World With My Smartphone: Volume 25

by Patora Fuyuhara

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